Sulfur 30

- A MAJOR TEXT OF RILKE'S
- OLSON'S LETTERS TO THE GLOUCESTER DAILY TIMES
- WEINBERGER ON THE HOLOTHURIANS
- POETRY BY CELAN, SCHWERNER, SOBIN, EIGNER, & PALMER
- GIEGERICH ON THE FABRICATION OF TIME

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A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: ARNULFO MENDOZA / LA DIOSA DEL MAIZ
Oil on canvas, 32" x 40", 1990.

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AMIRI BARAKA
WHEN MILES SPLIT!

Someone called me and said you died, Miles. Yeh, that cold. Here in North America, with all the other bullshit we putup with. You know. I know you know. Knew. And still know, where ever you is.

I'm one of yr children, actually, for all the smoke and ignorant mimmyjimmies. . . you know / I can say that. I was one of yr children / you got a buncha children man, more than you probably dug on the serious side. Not innocent ass fans. But the school of the world you created from inside the world's head. You gotta buncha children brother. I still am. Will be. In some important ways. For instance, I will never take no shit. Yr legacy. I will never believe anybody can tell me shit. Unless they are something I can feel. Like Aretha said. Something I can feel. You were that. I cd feel you, I cd be you when I was a little boy, up the street with the trumpet bag. I wanted to be in that music. I wanted to be that hip, that out, that whatever it was I felt you were. I wanted to be that. All my life.

What it was was the place and the time. But it was you describing it with your feeling. For me that place was Newark, where we grew, and then here you come so hip. I cd dig that I needed to be that, but more, I knew, I was that. I was with you in that fingering, that slick turn and hang of the whole self and horn. And the sound. I had never been in that place, there wasn't no such place in Newark, before.

I mean I never thought of the shit you made me think with *Godchild*. I never thought of nothing before like *Venus De Milo*. There was nothing in my life like that before you brother. And then the persona, what it all spelled. Yeh, I wanted to look like that. That green shirt and rolled up sleeves. on Milestones. That cap and seersucker on *Dig* I always wanted to look like that. And be able to play *Green Dolphin Street* or *Autumn Leaves* or *Walkin* or *Blue Haze* or *Round Bout Midnight*, or yeh yeh yeh yeh hey, even the mammy jammin *Surrey With The Fringe On Top*, as whatever he wanted, as tiny lyric, or cooler than thou, hot pointillist funkmares, cubist, expressionist, impressionist, inhabiting your being into a plane of omniscient downness (dig that!)

It was the self of us all the way without anything but our saying, our breath, night times, or walking where we was. We could be whole and separate from any dumb shit. We could be the masters, the artist, the diggenist knowers, the suave, the new, the masters.

This is what art doos. Your voice, that out sharp growl. That was how art should dig itself to be talking. *So What* is probably a prayer in the future.

I held my horn like that, and rolld my body like an ark of music, just looking at things. The cool placement of emotion. The information. I carried that consciously. No one could put me down, I was Miles child. His man. somehow. anyway.

And then each change, stage, was a path I wd walk. When I heard you as a little boy. Then went to see you. You was me alright. You was one of the few I could let be me.

Now some motherfucker wannta tell me you outta here. No. No. Miles. Why. You left. So right away I figure none of the shit still here is cool. But dig, Dizzy and Max is still here. So that's the pain. And I know I dig you. I know I carry *Dr. Jackle* in my speech. And *Godchild* and *Miles Ahead* and *Kinda Blue* and even Porgie and Bess, somethin Gershwin cdnt do.

Cause no one was that tender, that touching the where touch cd ultimately is.

They taking all the Giants. You. Trane. Duke. Monk. Billie. Your whole band is dead, man. Paul. Philly Joe. Cannonball. John. Red. Your whole band. and what does that do to us, but leave us on the shore watching the waves, and trying to write music from that regular funk.

But what it says is that our youth is gone. That we are the adult. What that? That you have it in yr hand now, to do. That if it will go, this life, this memory and history, this desire for freedom and a world family. That's its on you.

Like I dug, when Philly Joe hattd up. On us. If we are the ones. If it is to be, something other than the savages and bush mens. Then we got to. The giants. Our fathers and mothers. Sassy split last year. Monk. Count. LTD. If it is to go then we are the goers. The comers. In that whole sound and thought. That life that makes the blues. That makes the dark hip, the roll and rumble. Yeh. Then if, all that long two hundred centuries of slick, is to be on bein. Then we are the only carriers.

I cd dig the way you walked and held that horn. That gorgeous chilling sweet sound. That's the music you wanted playing when you was coming in a joint or just lookin up at the sky w/ yr baby by yo side. That mixture of America and Remerica and them Changes, them blue Africa magic chants. So I am a carrier. I got the stick. I aint stopping. If you, whoever else you tapped, then them too.

Headline the Giants are murdered. Then we got it. All of those who finally must dig, dont say it brother, truth and beauty. But who am I talkin to if you split, Miles, Man, and what the fuck is there to listen to. OK, everything.

Except you did leave jabillion ultra hip notes, 70 billion swift blue cool phrases. And how many millions of unheard dig'its, them nasty nasty silences right in the middle of the shit. Bee-bee beep beeppp., ba dee da dee da. . .

So what about it, like they say in the tradition, what about it, is Miles and them, John, Duke, Monk, Sassy all, the giants, does it mean our shit is over with? I know about the records and shit. I'm not talking about that. Does it mean, with the crazies vampin and now even some things look like regular niggers can break out with bushy tongues. Where before with your cool Boplicity in our heads it was somehow not only soft yet sharp yet gentle but like a weapon against such square shit as most of the rest of America is. That all of you giant figures that we emulate and listen to and hear and visualize night after night inside our heads, from the nightclubs, the concert halls, the bars, the records, the t. v. . . .is this, your death, like some hideous omen of our own demise, and I mean everbody here, not just niggers, cause if we go, this whole playhouse go up in smoke.

No, I mean either this death is the beginning of death in cut time, or it means that one earth has turned and another begun. One age, one era, one being. Listening to you now, and knowing that whole of change you went through, from life to life, from music to music, from revelation to revelation, even evolution can be dissolution or devolution.

But you was Bop when you got here, flyin w/the human headed soul Ba, Bird, the doped up revolutionary. Next, you was Cool. It was like your own creation yet, of course, very Presidential. Then you got with Philly and them for the harder Bop and then got Ball, the Dis Heah and Dat Dere of we funky story. Then you sic'ed the straight out vision monster on us Trane, in that perfect wonderful all time classical hydrogen bomb and switch blade band. Let us all always be able to hear *Straight No Chaser* anytime we want to.

I know the last few years I heard you and saw you dressed up all purple and shit, it did scare me. All that loud ass rock and roll I wasnt in to most of it, but look brother I heard *Tutu* and *Human Nature* and *D Train*. I heard you one night behind the Apollo for Q, and you was bashin like the you we knew, when you used to stand coiled like a blue note and play everything the world meant, and be in charge of the shit too. I'll always remember you like that Miles, and yr million children will too. With that messed up poppa stoppa voice, i know you looken up right now and say (growl) So What?

The Next Evening
9/29/1991

WILL ALEXANDER
from LIGHTNING

PART II
BALL LIGHTNING

During a thunderstorm I saw a large,
red hot ball come down from the sky.
—W. Morris in a letter to the
London Daily Mail

Disk falling from negative charges, hissing from primeval lenses, hot white thunder bolt spinning, dyed, binaural reverberation spinning, mother, it's isinglass, it's the verbal variation of mica, its heated tentacles like raging nose bleed colour, like a cloudy mass of hissing spiders, They say, it's a pelican eater, a random aerial ferocity, its heart, full of nematode resistors, encircled with shooting sparks from sinister tombstone sticks, hemoglobin sutures exploding inside a nest of carnivorous, insatiable crickets, whining like tornado blossoms, flecked with swirling cyanide waters, mother, it's a droplet of fire exploding as bunches of bees, pulsing like etheric solstice bodies, it is an axial flower of steel, a reckless astronomy, coursing through a maze of polysyllabic pitchblende, with its ghostly integument melting pellets of darkness, this thaumaturgic sun boar eating through meteoritic colours of wind, its centrality of blood, tearing the air with crocodile omegas of blankness, with invisible Buffalo flames, with its barbed wire grenades assaulting the potency of logic, hissing from the depths the universal fire of explosion, devouring, consuming, average corpses of people, taking light from the minds of the forgotten, taking away their musculature, their mental realms, their idleness, bursting across the atmosphere, like internal sparks revving up the flow of the language of demons, and the protracted flower that it gives is magnetically tied to the altar of panic, to the blind folded optics of Phobos, a mobile crater on fire, a wretched double curve of sleigh spleens, bringing about the deeper part

Part I of *Lightning* appeared in *Temblor* 8.

of being, the more melodious increments of pontoon tourniquets, of a gaseous fortress of greenness, a constantly erupting furnace inside an owl's clairvoyant manikin eternity, with its night time dawns, with its black spillage of roosters, with its nocturnal slivers piercing the cornea with phantoms, with intense levitational whistlings, which announces its deaths, its voyages, its body embargoes, its tubercular lemur interiors, its weight negatively encoded by zeros, by burnished astronomical bells sculpted in its motion of fire, its wrathful igneous knowledge, like a weightless floating cobra, genetically inscrutable, like a falling, undetected ozone egg

This disk, like flaming monastery science, like worms eating through a nunneries' birth systemics, as pregnant shellfish babies begin falling from its fires, glistening, in hawk white revelation, twisting around the incipience of salacious rhythmic intervention, their voices, as if cooking on a spectral appliance of blood, their faces, a blank algometer resistance, becoming backbone drachmas spinning from the unclean side of a compass, the heat that springs forward, like the magical hyperbole of Gondwanaland, its disaster spun, like the smoke of a fleeting altimeter beast

A beast inside its disk, minus pensive psychological cloves, minus tundra ejecting platelets, gases extracted from ostrich-coloured leper's applause, flitting along the skulls of deceptive x-ray gardens

And from this disk I see 30 blind water bulls raising marks from apertures of previously laid astrolabe contusions, sprouting unforeseen unresolvable dangers, overcome, at the split second hour of a hatchless speaking song bird, destroyed in its singing by uplifted venters of shattered iodine illumination

Yes, the disk speaks of codeless narcissism archetypes, of nightmare ululation, of indefinite digital figurines, and the disk, with its savage treasure ship digits, with its carcass of suicide tapestry, with its circular Venusian glare, with its illumined chemical talons, floats along the terrified slopes of ultraviolet grasses, its destruction of insect mangers like the permanence of a proto-apocalypse, its explosive tumbleweed shadows eating through the atmospheric neurons, is like a brightly lit snowstorm of desiccated resurrection

This Ball Lightning, its spectrum of blazing rainbow instincts, trebled, by the inner explosiveness of angles, propelled by jets of iconographic sulphur, its kinetic ferocity shattering, full of space, blood, bone, and star, full of melted dalmatian parabolas, full of subverted earthquake perpendiculars, sleepless, in its earthly parenthetical sunlight, in its circular climate swelled by heated floods from the rays of glacial firing tables

So this Ball Lightning, this disk, is a calendrics of golden lions floating across tornado foundations, soaked by Spanish sundial water, trampoline water, hovering in the air as a staggering vermilion ammonia, this fire disk in which I'm floating, with its levels of golden lions singing at shrines of cobalt, like hunting fish, like barracuda velvet, flashing formaldehyde signals, back and forth from the unknowable to the unknowable, eating roses from suspended tidal wave encirclement, their manes resplendent, like splintered mirrors of chaos, enriched by greenish non-formal gases, biting from the skies of southern suns oviparous anesthesia lapping like waves across the filaments of an embryo, which swirls in the skull as a bottomless oven of diamonds

I see in its circular fumes, eyes, the colour of crab, boiling inside a bone crossed pot of imaginary mercury, light spilling forth from an imploded urine candle, the colour of a-vernacular litmus, seething, with glandular dizziness, its power engendered by precisely embattled spasms, which animates incessant magnificence

Suddenly I'm singing in my space ship of fire, suddenly my mind grows wings, I call myself the gigantic mosquito who sucks and gives blood to its mystery, who sculpts inside his spinning ambush denials, a scene of brightened tarantula embraces, a forest of eclectic volcanic contusions, spawned from a hypnotic ginger

To see from this disk, I am cleansed with grounded facial negatives, with bone coloured writing, with vocal bone spur chemistry with rapier crusades, with hunchback conjunctions, spurred by verbal star belt eternities

In this Ball Lightning saucer, I experience telescopic cranial euphoria, opening my breath to the timeless flight of universal demons, where my negative appendages, crimson crocodile slivers, are lengthened and stretched behind the smoke screen of existence, become a vulture's breast in orbit, become that dyke of bone at the farthest side of human blood, from this disk, I see the stars as imperial-sized maggots, discoloured by a definitive alligator blockage, stars, swarming in electron ravines, suspended, gorged on concision, like eroded Cherokee blisters sucked into blackness, being eaten by vicious hydrogen eaters, by cosmic transfer gases, settling on the eye with the thick opacity of slumbering, the hair burned away by lymphatic circumference, then sharpened to flame throwers' mucous, my life conducted in tropic conundrums, in this Ball Lightning saucer, prophetically contingent with meteors

This circular explosion empirically haunting the fauna, spasmodically weakening the cacti, bringing up from the soil a mercurial ignescence, a leaking volcanism prairie, erupting and re-feeding its orbicular interior rivulets

I exist in this stunning obicular containment, as it floats along the sullage, as an erupting suicide flower, its genesis bursting from star-like craniums of frenzy, spewing ferocious nightingale ammonias, above perfectly chiseled kinetics of lava

And it attacks, and emits spikes at random lovers, with its power to float through impenetrable revetments, with lightning strikes at the superficial levels of human bodily contact, contact no deeper than sensual facsimile, and because, such love is imitation, it takes on an emblem of blackened ribbon duality, crushed under smoke, heaving white cells and parrots, singing with a catch in its throat, its decimals soldered and re-blended by light

I am conscious in this floating fire furnace, speeding into imperative indifference, mentally turning to a wolf, into a rattlesnake shower of teeth, into a predatory jackal, lunging at the psychic component of the rib and the femur, at the chronic physical subliminals, at the crouching work day servant, the body reduced to red shift reduction, to a terror which fully transcends the wrath of judgmental delirium

To see from this poetic obelisk of nerves, holes, dense holes, blinking sweat mirages, eating into to inevitable duplicity, lies always co-mingled with truth, lies at the heart of historical damage, degenerate salamander powders, compound verbal degeneration synonymous with outmoded expression detached from the lungs by explosion, by galvanic arsenic floods, seeping into the perfect fires, unloosed by the power of detachment

My ball lightning saucer is breaking apart, a sun swept by the void out of existence, osculation with the face of non-being, negative phosphorescence, phlogiston animation swallowed by the flank of darkness, distracted by accumulating parsecs, by seismic glycerin effacement, by a stunning Lupercalian debacle, shifted to illusionary varix planets, where I vanish by degree, making laryngeal recitations of sonorous neutron decades, hatching above this shattered ozone egg, a lyrical recitation of acids, like a debatable neutron wand, attempting to burn within a self imposed existence of peril

fin

PART III
RETURN STROKE

> It is the return stroke that produces the bright channel of high temperature that we see.
>
> —Martin Uman,
> *Understanding Lightning*

Lightning channel filled up with language
dense concrete hand clapping
mercury sawed off and reborn like wings on perpetual monsters
perpetual griffin toxicity
green coloured vipers
connecting
rising from strike point meteors
heated by lightning water
by flaring cobweb fire
fused
in vertical fish net contraction/explosion
vertical mongoose firings with flashes of vapour
with paint sniffing angels hallucinating castles of horses and
    terror
Pintos
Appaloosas
blue/green stallions of smoke
verbal oracular meathooks
in flight
like flaming Condor pelts
turning loose a general declaration of Gila monster heavings
spinning stellar incoherence
singing parasitic herbicide manoeuvres
codeine orations
blank salt added to bitter axial infusorias
primeval cyclone masquerades putting on and pulling off lizard
scales and sizes heated in the meatless progenitor of botulism
decades
crumbling in the hands of liars religiously ensconced

in non-demanding occult perspectives
in clinical oxygen pans sucking at an insect foetus
locked in dead men's motives
refusing to admonish the lice from the skull of a ruthless
hummingbird guru
emasculated wolf dogs
corroded puma instincts
soul drinkers
terminal leopard paw enzymes marked with mottled hornet's
nest jellies
open audacious flaring
rancid thunderstorm achievement four times hotter than the sun
on this night
the moon blazes with negative calligraphy
writing from the wells of obverse dimension
inverted mirrors
cancelling themselves in voiceless armband canals
sunless psychological robbery flying flag high in Bardo
where nauseous beings wrestle with swimming cloud burst
needles
automata of the void
fighting for golden breakthrough discoveries
for the "golden cord" that illuminates creation
that ties their bodies to whirlwind intuition
to the simultaneous shaft of the soul
immediately apprehended without memory intervening
vertiginous constants
invincible
without let up
hand to hand combat with corrosive sea food doctors
who hatch from themselves
bilingual icthyosaur's discovery
rising again from nausea
from a hundred hot atmospheres of blackness
blind thunder charges
with weapons stacked higher and higher
in their magical defense of green bloodshed
doctors
lime worts

pustules of infamous chlorophyll poppies projected sideways in
time
eclipsing normal eyesight
which cannot see when it sees
but is able to see when it wants to see sun when it sees
singing anathema cloves in bottled gargoyle summers
printing frenetic hiker's pamphlets
obtaining bone meal suppers
smearing the sky with maniacal bat wing potion
a blizzard of bat wing acid inducing a reprehensible furnace
of ashes
bringing a cloud of citron struggles to the fore
a war of cement lasers between spirits obnoxiously engendered
by
nuclear bourbon intercourses
all these spirits whining in aborted saliva
crossbred with harelip canons and gluttonous moonbeam errata
these spirits
physically phantom
yet tenaciously conscious by a lack of golden optical penetration
by a lack of intense red blood in their spirits
going down into the poisonous
into dispassionate Abracadabra
like clumsy surgical convicts ensnared by a millstone of zeros
like pharmaceutical charismas latching on to inherent
beguilements
which obstruct the periodic flow of fluidic enigmas ingrained
in enigmas
nonagon temperatures boiling inevitable wildebeest pages
bewitching the glabella with isagogic principles of being
with its fire face turned inward
glowing ancient lepidopterous habits
river of explosive lochia re-vomiting itself in a bedlam of dwarfs
a rhinal sailor
a timbale baking in pelargonial watches
concerned with the acrobatical peltast soldier
swinging like a pendulum
back and forth
charging and retreating until the air is cut in half

divided further
to a split in seven directions of the both sides of being
then resolving the fourteen compartments to one vast circle of triumph
then instantaneously recongealed in the inchoate masterful synthesis
of dawn in the void
of fragments of blood transmuted to bodies
creation starts its nervous illuminating lodestar voyage
around a planetary light of basic carbon crystals
charged
with ingrown abstraction of the numinous
with invisible horse race genitalia
full of flight
up and down the planet's collective axial mazes
as if a camel with wings gliding across a microscopic desert
holding out at 10,000 inches
as it surveys a swarm of bleeding vegetal magnets
magnets attracting androgynous enemies to their caves
so they can eat them
so that they turn their bones yellow
ingesting in a flash a half billion parsecs
returning from space
reporting encephalonic tarnish to this floating terrestrial carcass
a planet of continuous fire
a planet of eyes suspended in moon heat sweating primeval rainbows
"Antwerp Blue"
"Cobalt Green Deep"
"Transparent Gold Ochre"
mixed
in sumptuous combinations of terror
creating an earthly carnivorous spectrum
inside the eyeshaft of subtle icicle cities
creating a giant loquacious bee with insatiable verbal insomnia
turning its instincts in all directions
creating in its wake
a river of vapourous soliloquies amidst geographic voice prints
so when the hearing transpires

the collective fauna cringe
lightning
you are not of this world
you are spectral susurration
as you illuminate the bee who's ruler of his world
he makes the laws
forms the opposition
creates rules which he immediately destroys
and turns backward inside his inward domain
to re-invent events
to posture
to suck in ptomaine candles
and make new causes and new endings
elliptically re-routing death
with heightened bunches of vibratory concentration
which is a sea of dead beetles
which he disrupts with a less repulsive judgmental arcana
only to create a scholarly hack saw fish which murders on
contact
this ruler
this bee king of the living
12 ft. tall and more vibrant than a Condor
starts humming electric musical spaces
minuses
as if horses
with the speed of blazing porcelain integers
were corrupted and reformed
leaving one galaxy and going to another
a revolution spinning outside of light
a black cylindrical motion of voices
which turns magenta on the eardrums
and extends to each bipedal being a timbre of salt
a flood of Rhine wine blisters
and we exchange our eardrums for helium sutures
stretched
into star tree lizards
wrapped
into the imploded coils of compacted anesthesia
and we wake up as the collective one person

staring from an intentional hollow enclave
at a glowing moat of ravens
vicious ravens tearing at a letter inches and inches from ingrown hypothesis
which saturates its light with an ingrown sense
pregnant with visibility
with riches of continuous eternities
so that the raven of the most enduring death succeeds in being golden
as if one raven
all ravens
gold of the greatest bird
the blind mortality ocean is crossed
the sun densely rises from oblivion
and becomes a cornea
a half blue shadow that bursts and becomes novae
fully lighting electron diameters
50,000 sheets of darkened chemical intensities
like burning mathematical schooners sailing over snow
like a sky fire intelligence
a Brazilian seriema
neck in the air
sucking stars through its eyes
an electrical haze forming in its wings
its digestion of compact stellar arrangement
boiling
its bloodstream bodies consistently revolting
and this seriema singing circles of universal umber
its wings moving
with the solar operas of space
with the circular face of the galaxies spread between suns
its feathers on fire from carbon based cold
light of magic optical fuses blown in the vision
of blazing frost bite planets
of explosive kimonos flowing like flairs in the vision
radical
divine
like the ghastly beauty of magnetic heavenly vultures
a cross bones beauty of continuous instants

a beauty of hoisted skulls on gallows
armpit marimbas playing ghost flash music
disguised as seismic gunpowder charges drifting into inadvertent
rhino plankton
fecundating an alien spy
roaming a cocktail party in Delhi
sowing iridium wounds in martinis
where a tubercular princess suddenly unleashes her electrifying
scruples
"wordlessly singing" strumpets' saliva
her pleasures ensnared by document on a pulsing bed of cobras
her menses
tapped by a chandelier of roses
where this spy
with its dendritic thirst
visualizes her consorts with intuitive antennae connecting India
to Mars
polluting Martian ingrown water supplies with insidious
antimonies
which this Andromedan spy sets awry with thoughts of
thousands of
cranes
of rainbows bleeding into water
of rubefacient waves seeping rufescent soil over a stark internal
oasis
an ululation of consciousness
of vermiculate whispers exploding verdurous dictatorships
verging
on verification
no more skate fish ceilings
no more scarlet manure flecked with scattered backbone pieces
no more skull bone bodies of blended centipede mixtures
finding the future of gassy tomahawks' bleach spilling through
a brilliant atmosphere of blindness
an Algonquian appetite for isothermics
for carrion activity focused in the higher digestives
illusive mortality cravings
"passing screams"
of a New Guinea golden pigeon blending being and non-being

dipping its wings in swirling cerulean waters
and calls on fire
"Son of Force"
"Truth"
"swiftest raining increase"
breaking the geometry of mirrors
climbing through the fog into the topmost pinnacles of fever
into the fire stone firmament
with vipers' venom
with axial omegas
like a resistant armadillo melted into light
and the existent thermogenesis
like bull's sperm
or giant's powder
blasting through the ghost dance writhings
to reach the plenitude of endlessness
yes
lightning
striking the human gut strings with hammers of brightness
with heightened coyote tattoos
with nerve end neutrinos burning in the brain
the mind calmed by invisible protein inflammables
powerful sodium wings flying in the stillness
telic photography mantras jumping from the tops of clouds
exploding radar enjambment with shattered sensual descriptions
these magic aerial fuels expressing themselves in compounded
    slashes
in voltage coronas
electrosphere concentration
breaking through a curvature of targets
stretched vertex
perpendicular ichthyosaur
piercing the brink of the transparent boundless

ARMAND SCHWERNER
STOREHOUSE

She holds herself ready for the blows of the unpremeditated. So interesting that it all takes place in-between. No holes are barred. When the states go well the sentience smells like old velvet in odd folds. *Undulant* she thinks, and she hasn't rushed once, the seeing middle finger barely moving in its tight gooey canoe entrance, her left thumb and index finger surgically in a gentle fixedness clamping the outer labia in some visualized accordance with a smoky-thick heavy idea, a half-unwilled stasis, benignly motionless necessity. Dual. The striated sides of the boat, arcing, surround the waves and rise through her intestines, establishing through the realms of her awarenesses of her islanded organs both the pain of losing the discreteness of heart, pancreas, liver, Isle of Langerhans, *and* the confounding pleasure. She is two now, symmetries of dual onenesses, and in the deepest gratefulness owes her life to these parallel barriers against the threats of totality. Because her eyes hurt she listens to them. If they leave her. When. It isn't someone else. Islands. It's no longer a matter of ungovernable flakes, untidying everything, unbalancing. She falls through a stringency of despair. When everything leaves there's a death something left. Behind all a ram of steel, governing. In back of that, landed organs, an end to the messy flux, no more piecework, angerhands, continuous suturing, staring and rapt in a needle world of rapt fits of healing, in healing. Fair exchange in this loss of early morning variegated mystery, wild spectrum, disorder in the many, such a sweetness in the undulant flock of recollections in her fingers. (branching.) The cloying perfection in what she's doing absorbs her increasingly. She falls inside the viscous lemony circle her arms make with her thighs and outer lips, remaining inheld with a respect voice as if in obeisance to the sun but there is no sun. Her right hand begins to cramp and she's on the cusp of rushing. But

ready *now* not later not another time in an excitement or surrounding an excitement as if either building a building of primary colors or, with the pain of loving attentiveness, unmistakenly, distinctively, surrounding the shape blackly, heavily bordering it. At which she feels a red of searing pain. It's crazy, like to catch a net in a web, or rather as if to drive flickerings over the hill into a One by means of a gross surround. And her body's too small

for such battles. Most would be. Better to follow the swelling of the object in modulated colors and happen into several outlines. Too much speed. The ram speaking in her respect voice barely cognizable. There's a lot of wet dickering now, small flashes of nearly ungovernable flakes threatening red abandons, wastrels into a many, and a hoping like an attaching iron-searing she doesn't even want, a hoping against the grain to avoid a One slammed into over a hill, too much angerwork, threats of hands into pieces transformed by the now meat-eating sheep of fingers, recollecting in a violence, barely in a petal avoidance grazing the labia.

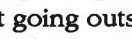
And again either

wraith of devotion and absence, or regina of chairs and glasses and colonies of patience and laundry healings and quotidian celebrant of small progressively invasive fingertip recollections, cicatrice-traces of endless tiniest slivercuts, nicks of private history unrevealing of *which* body flourished in *which* diffusedly memorable pain-deveining shrimps, scrupulous memories of othering attentivenesses to engorged penile corollae, her entire body almost an idea of progression, a raving sleep or a tumid alertness; she moves minutely, heavily as in a delayed unsatisfactoriness of a pelvic tilt undone by the absorption of the mattress. She vows never again to be a mouth of spent words, breasts of exfoliating allure, neither *a* nor *b* but two-for-all in a trans-lation gone into and through will-lessly, moved by a circumambient desire but not a narrow ram's, or, revels over, moved to say Pain, Pain, and, overcome, to overcome. Story. In a forward movement. Idea of going. Handhold. The safe of a temporary two between a horror and a horror. In a heart-illness there's no body fire. The liver tries ruggedly, separated rugged heart tries, rugged trials establish islands, stress more stress on the other organs, rugged and purely separating and pure hell in disconnections, ladylikelihood; the kidneys try; and not only; the others; beehive; skein; web; haul-seine; leaf-veins of worlding. The nature of information relaxes into a loss. No mail. O fuck the dead her finger

ram penis, not silvery angel-fish smooth-scaled and glinty in a boxed wetness safely enclosed, imagination of home fortress, defense: well all right; why not accept this weakness of considering a home home. Feels. Island of safety. Island of comfort. Her entire body the ram's voice, uncognizable from an outside, think of that! Unterritorial, her hand as a man's, vastly

unsettling. *Grand âge, nous voici.* Heat, order, submission, memory-fingers of come in her mouth. To leave all this now, even given the pleasures of will, is to go away from the knowledge of the sweetness of everyone's interchangeable servitudes. The ochre bed sheets are bunched under her coccyx. She wishes she could wish to sleep—

encompassed, and in the inert, heavy, thick, brown, inevitable mind muck occurs a desperate dance of shielding from the ferretings out and the

objectifications of her hurting eyes and she hears the slow tearing sounds of the reed-spears' invasions on the murky screen of mind, a vicious plant-language of untranslatable morphemes reified into Enemy as if carrot-sticks could cry out. She is constrained to hold on to the crazy horizontal oblique and vertical lancings to apply against the terror that the links inside the dream might become locus and stay put, bridge transformed into stolid continent; such a welcome to be going back, the old writing on her mind-screen, the roving incision-making triangles singing sharp-edged archaic movements suggesting a fervent going outside the container,  She hears through her throat *aan aaaniy aarib byna aan aaaani aarib aarib aarib byn byn byn* however far there's always more, far in you go, you can trust *that* if anything; isn't going *in* deeply, deepest, finally—she thinks inside a crystal availability to the formulation—coming out in being in the outside common air? To see to answer to enter to know. . . . Hearing, sound of the sharp bird-talk of the reed-spears. They do their own breathing after all, not so other. It sounds. Hearing's so old and in common.

MARJORIE WELISH
TWO POEMS

CASTING SEQUENCES

A page dramatically estranged, nor lacking
bombardment out of
sync
with the event that
annihilated into sudden pianissimo
a few songs.
Where death is naked to the waist
in radiance,
and sudden extension
piloted across a vocal line
finds an event,
the page lies still, a chaotic catchall of springtime.

Alphabetizing the cards
slavishly
the person comes first,
in cold blood
and spelled out. . .
"pale and enfeebled by the remoteness"
of actuality.
Of actual number, pale
and spelled in cold,
a person is impeturbably
alphabetizing cards
torn from himself,
casting from himself riddle and raven,
riddle and reticule.

Mildew
"of adjacent realities"
and recurrent themes
and recursive themes,
assisting the physics of a sinking fast ball or aerodynamic
stall—speculative,
half-visible—and all talking at once,
the only such televised
obliquities in which
the elite and public are exactly coincident
and lifted up.
To get livelier,
to accelerate the unridable lift,
the only such televised praxis, half-visible
breaking pitches
wince—
and they all remark on it,
they all recur
in the slower moving air.

TWENTY-THREE MODERN STORIES

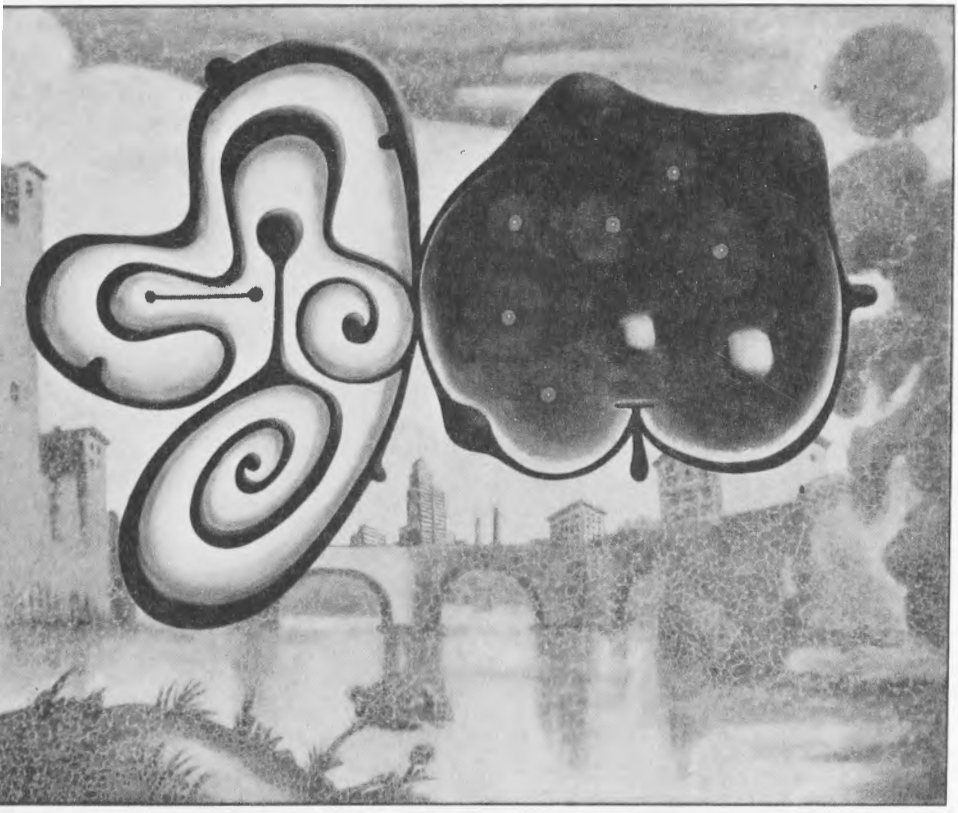
Perpetually roughed up
by the dawdling, blushing drone of an airplane,

"the viola with a restrained, sometimes" restringing
made the plunge
upon these planks
because of all the shores that must be visited.

". . .and continuities, whose intersections"
spreading hot wax
on privation
and on the phrase "this text,"
united once again,
are inescapably drawn toward the open door.

The bells have ceased altogether.
"The air bit hard and cold"
spaced in such a way as to make a
triad
of arrangements thus:
old and tired star, guitar and protean
interdisciplinary soprano.

DAVID HUMPHREY
SIX PAINTINGS

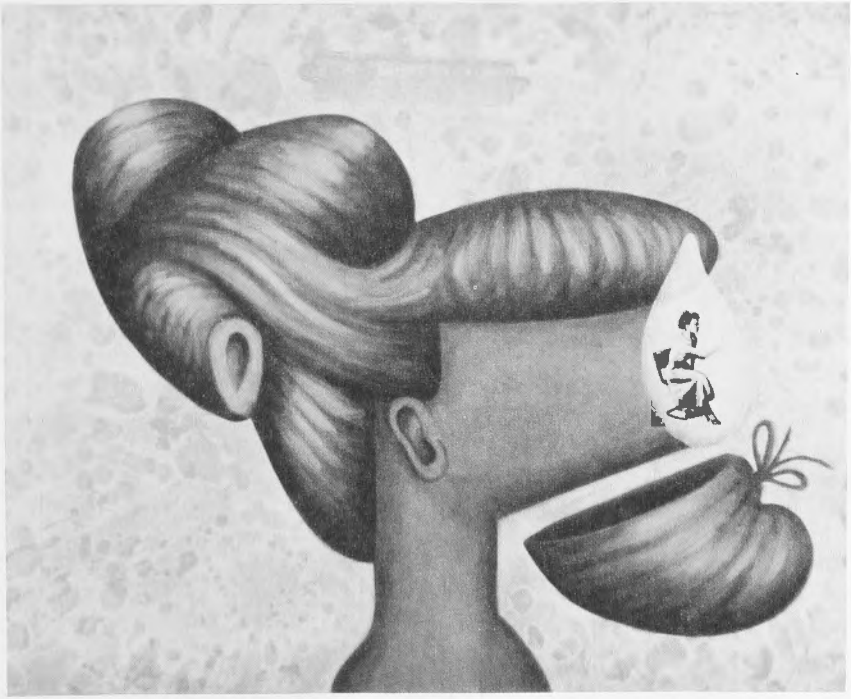


THE PRESENCE OF THE BELOVED

Oil on canvas, 60" x 72", 1989
All photos courtesy of David McKee Gallery, NYC

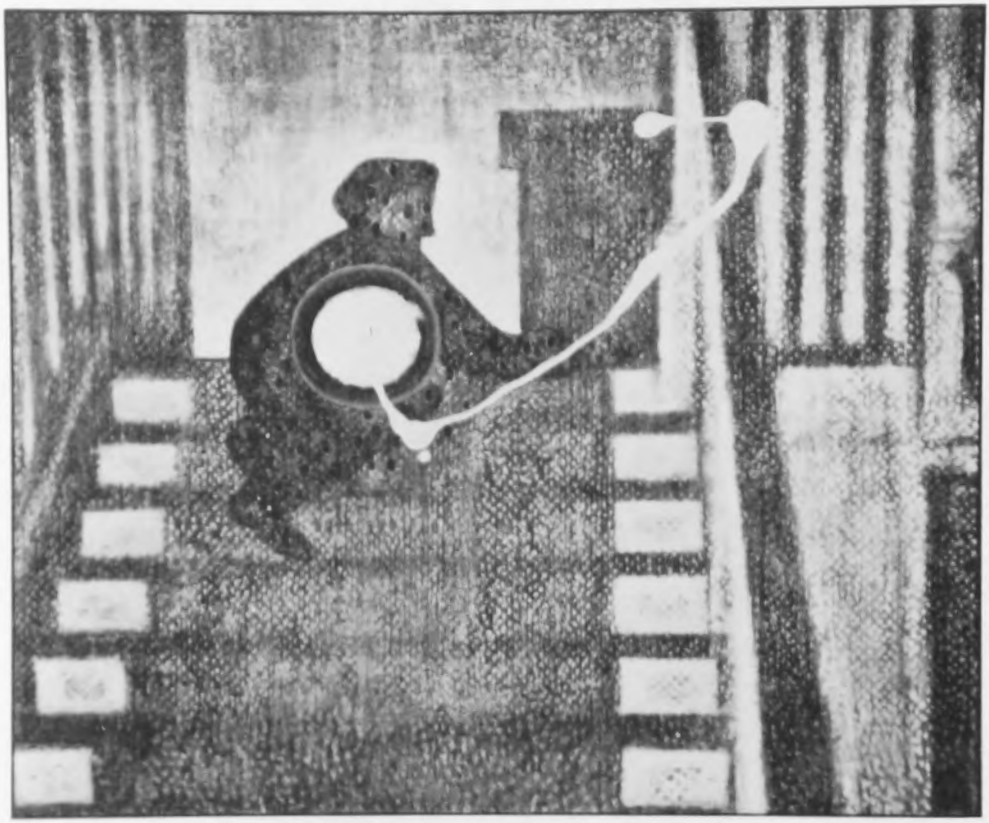
INVOLUNTARY HISTORIES

Oil on canvas, 50" x 36", 1989



LIKE HERSELF

Oil on canvas, 56" x 40", 1990

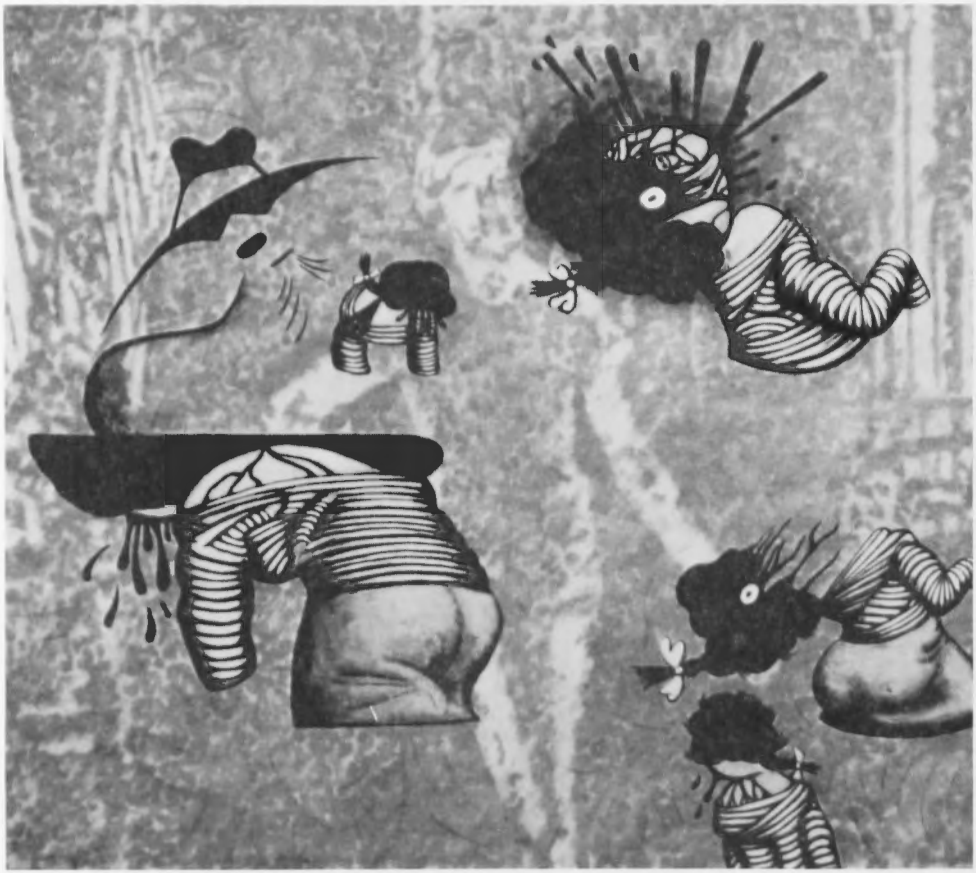


TOP OF THE STAIRS

Oil on canvas, 60" x 70", 1990

CHRISTMAS 1962 II

Oil on canvas, 76" x 96", 1991



GIRL

Oil on canvas, 72" x 82", 1991

PAMELA WYE
DAVID HUMPHREY: ADJUSTING THE PICTURE

A game of dare is in progress in David Humphrey's recent paintings. Between invented shape and photographic image; between psychic truth and "official" memory. It's an upping of the ante designed to squeeze more out of the ubiquitous family photo while confronting personalized painted shapes with their maker's historical familial past—a past toward which invented shapes generally feign [claim] indifference or, at most, distant lineage. The mutual prodding between the nearly-verbal ("realistic") narrative of the photographs and the obstinately non-verbal (enigmatic) presence of the painted shapes yields an edgy show-and-tell of the picture's psychological innards.

This power struggle in Humphrey's recent work is a reflection of the push and shove going on between painting and photography in the art world in general. The return (and reacceptance) of figurative painting (in the late seventies through to the mid-eighties) placed narrative language back in the domain of painting. Photography, allied with an ironic neo-conceptualism, subsequently siphoned narrative away from painting and, without immediately appearing to do so, slipped it back into view in a more cool yet strangely more intimate guise. While, for example, the ironic, staged photographs of Cindy Sherman have recently become more stridently expressionistic and consequently less effective, the straight-forward, banal "found" photographs in Christian Boltanski's installations are deeply affecting and nearly voyeuristic in their intimate ordinariness. Ordinary snapshots belonging to ordinary people are very personal. In the case of Boltanski, we know what the faces in the photographs cannot know. We're the future looking back at a past that can't know what history has in store for it. In Humphrey's paintings, the photos he uses are his own family snapshots—of the kind we all have lying around somewhere in our lives. The painting that Humphrey pursues on this ground of childhood history is a stubborn groping for visual expression of inarticulate desires, fears and conflicts, a process of "knowing" the personal present by literally linking it with its "innocently" decisive past. It's as though Humphrey dipped his photographic prints through an additional (al)chemical bath, revealing the eccentric machinery of hidden impulses that imbues a scene with life but which official family cameras don't pick up.

The photos, initially worked over through Xeroxing and computer manipulation, are blown-up, oil-painted versions of themselves. Their color is a function of the requirements of the painting rather than a restitution of the actual scene. Their surface is streaky, mottled and splotched. Turpentine splatters give them an alternately pock-marked, marbleized look, one of age, deterioration or perverse chemical reaction. How, and how much, the photo maintains its identity in the onslaught of painting that comes after it is a central issue in this work.

In "Christmas II," for example, the photo not only remains recognizable as a photo, but its specific narrative qualities are central to the painting, while in "Girl" the orange ground, not immediately readable as a photo of a girl, slips easily into illegibility. This slippage varies from painting to painting and is indicative of the basic anxiety of image-making in an electronic age; an anxiety which, in Humphrey's case, often resolves itself by giving painting the upper hand. In some instances, however, "Christmas II" being a good example, Humphrey maintains an evenly distributed tension between painting and photography that allows him to use the best of both worlds.

In the selection of paintings reproduced here, Humphrey has divvied up the roles of painting and photography with increasing clarity and effect. "Presence of the Beloved" and "Involuntary Histories" (both 1989) are the earliest works in this group. In both, the photo ground is clearly subordinate to the painted forms. In "Beloved," two biomorphic shapes that read as male and female hover before a hazy photographic image of an idyllic scene that looks lifted from some '50s' dining-room wallpaper. The background scene's good-natured take on European Romanticism (full of airy and watery dreaminess) reads as a projection of the self-absorbed euphoric weightlessness of the couple's own new love. Any tension in this painting exists as potentiality in the "male" figure's affectionate butting up against her butt, flexing his muscles, muscling in on her. While the "male" figure is all racing circulatory system, "she" is all nice butt, but cosmic, starry-night nice butt that, allied with the faraway, "olden days" quality of the background scene, and the coltishness of the male figure, gives a gloss of "old romance," of mother-romance, to the piece.

Hair's representation has long been a preoccupation of Humphrey's—head-hair, as opposed to body-hair. Though, clearly, for this artist, the head is part of the body. In 1990, Humphrey published an article entitled "Hair Piece" in which he investigates, in a comprehensive manner, the wide-ranging issues of hair and its representation in contemporary art. I will not try to recapitulate that article here, but direct the reader to *Art Issues*, February 1990, for a very good read.

One of the "hair pieces" in the current selection of Humphrey's paintings is "Involuntary Histories." The "involuntary" in the title is as much

about our helplessness with regard to our body's workings as it is about our participation in the larger cultural fashions (of hair, in this case) that make up history. There is, however, a creepiness about this painting that is more disturbing than speculations about cultural fashions would imply. While the neat, graceful knot of hair in the upper right corner looks ornamental and easily undone, and the smallest knot at the left has a surrealist quirkiness about it, the largest conglomeration of tight French twists in the lower center of the painting seems the result of a more anxious twisting and turning. Almost a wringing of the hands—or neck. Overlaying the area of the woman's head in the underlying dim photographic image, this shape appears as a mental image, in the sense of a visual approximation of an inner state, that, like a Gordian knot, is perplexing and foreboding. It speaks of tension and unresolved conundrums. Its resemblance to viscera or feces reminds us that the mind resides in the body and shares in its conflicts. And it literalizes the psychoanalytic association of painting and playing with feces. In this respect, Humphrey remains very much a hands-on painter.

"Like Herself" (1990), another "hair piece," has a cartoony, slapstick quality that belies its horrific image of the face of womanhood: blank and truncated. What's Humphrey saying with this title? That maybe she should "like herself"? Or is it more in the line of "that's something 'like herself,' but not exactly herself"? The lack of eyes, nose or mouth focuses attention on the orifices that do exist—the ear, the cross-section of tubular hair, and the pouch-like opening of wrapped hair/chin where the mouth should be—a sort of prosthetic beard for women. Instead of an eye, she has a large tear containing a 1950s-ish photo image of a lady-artist who, curiously, has no hands and no painting as far as the eye can see. What does this say about women artists? "Not by the hair of your chinny, chin, chin, sweetheart?" Ear/hair/hear/her: the proximity and similarity of the hair-do's orifice and the ear implies an intimacy of closed-circuit communication. "*Psst,* do you want to hear a secret?" she said to herself, sounding *like herself.* The trouble is, here, if no one else hears her speak her mind, will she ever actually become herself, or only remain *like* herself?

While the photographic image in "Beloved" and "Involuntary Histories" plays a background role, and the one in "Herself" is confined to a small space, in "Top of the Stairs" (1990) and "Christmas II" (1991), the photo carpets the whole canvas, and plays the central role in the paintings' form and content. "Top of the Stairs" has the wooly feel of a blanket—the photo's digitalized surface and the paint's fuzzy texture mesh with the weave of the canvas and the linearity of the stairs to create a woof and warp of nocturnal terror that alludes to the bedcovers of upstairs bedrooms. In its Japanese-like rectilinearity and its mysterious foreboding, this painting recalls the latent sexuality of Balthus's paintings of prepubescent girls. Here, a male

child flees a nameless terror that appears like an apparition to strike from without, but which, in fact, originates from within the center of his own body like an impulse. This apparitional paint splatter, whose form and placement seem too fortuitous to be random, refers back to the psychologically loaded gestures of Abstract Expressionism. In a successful attempt at painterly cross-fertilization, Humphrey mates a Jackson Pollack drip, historically disembodied from figurative representation (but owing its power to the *painter's* body), with the narrative figure of a repainted photograph.

If "Top of the Stairs" goes back to the literal scene of the crime in an anonymous fashion—the fleeing figure remains faceless and generalized, "Christmas II" returns to the spot and names names. The "crime" is not acted out in the "real" world, but works in the realm of desire and impulse. In "Christmas II," the foregrounded boy-artist (wielding a gun, no less) sits at the head of the table in a re-enactment/playacting of the mother/father/child triangle. The older artist/boy (the gun wielder) and the sister's clothed bodies are linked as two black forms that meet and merge as one shape under the table. The younger male, as the vexed outsider in this triangle, contemplates from a distance the fantasized incestuous couple, or is it the gun he wants? While "Involuntary Histories" visualized tightly wound knots left hanging—as in, not dealt with, "Christmas II" functions as part of the patient process of unraveling (as in comprehending) the prototypical entanglements that begin in childhood. Here, instead of hanging metaphoric knots, Humphrey has hung, upside-down, a pulp-novel illustration of interlaced lovers (distorted by computer manipulation) above (and over) his sister's head like a mistle-toe of amorous projection. These narratives obviously resonate well beyond the artist's personal history, taking cues from Greek tragedy to Freudian theory. But, also, the middle-class domestic props (from family snaps to dining-room furniture) make these paintings familiar—I know these people, they're the reflection of me that I recognize from '5Os' sitcom TV—"Leave It To Beaver" and "Father Knows Best." "Christmas II" has something of that narcissistic voyeurism of network television. The adult artist, in making the painting, "adjusted the picture" of his boy-self who returns his gaze. He looks at him who watches him look at him. And we're watching it all.

In "Girl," the straight-forward, frontal photo of an open-armed little girl, not immediately legible, serves as the ground upon which Humphrey flings a vituperative imagery of misogynous energy. It feels like a desecration. What's she done to him? Is desire's power that strong? I love you therefore I hate you. I want you so much I could kill you. The cartoony, Bellmer-like mutilated females have blasted heads (blown away by an ejaculative force?) with hair like blood-stains and splatters (but tied with little-girl bows), no hands or legs but an adolescent's dream of an ass, and

a tightly wrapped, shoulder-baring shirt, like a straight-jacket, yet also reminiscent of the wound hair pieces of Humphrey's earlier paintings ("hair-shirt" comes to mind). What sin is this penance for? These truncated bodies are similar in shape to the "body" of hair in "Like Herself" except here the body is literalized and there's a feeling of energetic time-lapse aggression: "And I'll do this to her, and then this, and then this, and this . . . ." The smallest version of this mutilated figure looks to be on all fours like a brutalized poodle. Is lap dog the desired transformation? No wonder the good-natured photo fades and recedes, recoil might be a better word.

"Girl" is a powerful, no-holds-barred visualization of the primitive impulses that underlie desire. It is a watershed of sorts among the haunting images in Humphrey's recent paintings where photographic ghosts assert themselves into the painter's imaging process and bring with them the not-always-pretty impulses of childhood which, whether we like it or not, form the basis of our adult selves.

PAUL CELAN

EIGHTEEN POEMS *from* THREADSUNS (BEING THE COMPLETE FOURTH CYCLE)

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris)

IRISH

Give me the right of way
across the grain ladder into your sleep,
the right of way
across the sleep trail,
the right, for me to cut peat
along the heart's hillside,
tomorrow.

THE ROPES, salt-water-clammy:
the white
top knot—this time
it does not come undone.

On the seagrass chute next to it,
in anchor's shadow,
a name teases the
untwinned
riddle.

DEW. And I lay with you, thee, in the rubble,
a mushy moon
pelted us with answer,

we crumbled apart
we brittled back together:

the Lord broke the bread,
the bread broke the Lord.

LAVISH MESSAGE
in a crypt, where
we flap with
our gasflags,

we stand here
in the odor
of sanctity, yep.

Singed
vapor waves of the beyond
thickly drift from our pores,

in each second
tooth-
cavity an un-
destructible hymn wakes up.

The clump of twilight you throw down to us,
come, swallow it too down.

THIS DAY, rolled out:
the many-thousand-years-old dough
for the later
hunic flat cake,

a just-as-old
jaw, somewhat oozy,
commemorates all early times,
and bares its teeth against them and itself,

hoof-
beats of the protoanimal to the
yeast-arioso:
it goes, flat-cake beautiful singable growth,
still and always upwards,

a shadow-
less spirit, dis-
lonelied, an
immortal,
shivers
blissfully.

OILY still
the die's One swims
between brow and brow,
stops here,
lidless, follows
your gaze.

YOU WITH THE
in the darkglass gazed at,

you One
with the beheld
substanceless light-mirror-surface innermost:

through the ten-
towered desert gate your
messenger-self steps before you, stands,
for the length of a triple vowel,
in the high
redness,

as if the people in the distances
were once again gathered around you.

OUT OF ANGEL-MATTER, on the day
of the ensouling, phallically
united in the One
—He, the Enlivening-Just, slept you towards me,
sister—, upwards
streaming through the channels, up
into the rootcrown:
parted
she hoists us up, equal-eternal,
with standing brain, a bolt of lightning
sews our skulls aright, the pans
and all
the still to be dissemened bones:

strewn from the East, to be harvested in the West: equal-
eternal—,

where this script burns, after the
threequarter-death, before
the rolling around remainder-
soul, which
writhes in crownfear,
since ur-ever.

THE FREE-BLOWN LIGHTCROP
in the under worldblood
standing furrows.

A hand with the shimmer of the urlight
poaches beyond
the ferny dams:

as if there still starved
any stomach
as if there fluttered
any still to be
fertilized eye.

LINE THE WORDCAVES
with panther skins,

widen them, hide-to and hide-fro,
sense-hither and sense-thither,

give them courtyards, chambers, drop doors
and wildnesses, parietal,

and listen for their second
and each time second and second
tone.

THE HIGHWORLD—lost, the delusion-ride, the day-ride.

Ascertainable, from here on out,
the with the rose in the fallow year
home-sensed Nowhere.

THE MUTTERING
arms-
passes.

On the leaped over
step

the deathdoodads
diddle.

. . .THOUGH NO KIND OF
peace.

Greynights, preconscious-cool.
Stimuli-quanta, otterlike,
over consciousness-gravel
on the way to
memory-vesicles.

The grisaille of matter.

A halfpain, a second, without
permanent trace, halfway
here. A halfpleasure.
The moved. The cathexed.

Repetition-compulsion-
monochrome.

NEAR, IN THE AORTIC ARCH,
in the light-blood:
the light-word.

Mother Rachel
weeps no more.
Carried over:
all the weepings.

Quiet, in the coronary arteries,
unconstricted:
Ziv, that light.

THROW THE SUNYEAR, to which you cling,
over the heart railings
and row to, starve yourself away, copulating:

two germcells, two metazoons,
that's what you were,

the inanimate, the homeland,
now requests return—:

later, who knows,
one of you two, transformed,
may re-emerge,
a slipper animalcule,
ciliated,
in the shield.

BECAUSE YOU FOUND THE WOE-SHARD
in the deserted settlement,
the shadow-centuries relax by your side
and hear you think:

Maybe it is true
that here peace debated two peoples,
from clay pots.

IT HAS COME THE TIME:

The brainsickle, unsheathed,
lounges in the sky,
rumbled by gallstars,

the antimagnets, the rulers,
sound off.

LIPS, ERECTILE TISSUE of the You-night:

Hairpincurve-glances are climbing up,
making out the commissure,
sew themselves fast here—:
No admittance! Blacktoll.

There should still be glowworms.

WOLFGANG GIEGERICH
THE FABRICATION OF TIME[1]

Time, the time in which we live, seems to be an a priori given, utterly out of reach for humans, who because they are inescapably subject to it and limited by it, have been given the name "the mortals" by the Greeks, in contradistinction to the Gods, who enjoy eternal youth. But of course, it is also well known that the idea and experience of time has changed in the course of human history. We distinguish, e.g., the circular sense of time experienced by most archaic peoples from the linear sense of time governing our modern being-in-the-world. In a certain sense, therefore, time must be just as much subject to human history as human history before seemed subject to, and embedded in, time. One could get out of this contradiction if one were to distinguish two kinds of time, actual time ($time_1$) on the one hand, and the idea or experience of time ($time_2$) on the other. $Time_2$, as a human conception, would then be contained in, and subject to, $time_1$, the almighty Time of history. However, philosophically the trick of separating two kinds of the same thing is never very convincing, and so here, too, a quick reflection will force us to realize that $time_1$ must be just as much a human idea as $time_2$, so the problem returns.

Instead of trying to solve this dilemma in a philosophical way, I here want to demonstrate that, and in which concrete way, *our* time, linear historical time, the time in which the events of physics, the evolution of the species, the history of mankind, as well as our individual lives occur, is the product of an original invention and manufacturing. Of course, this manufacturing does not take place in factories, but in the primary industry of the soul's imagination.

We can turn to the Old Testament prophets in order to witness the process of the fabrication of historical time.

Originally, the prophetic word was oral, addressed to the people of the prophet's time and community. But then at one point prophecy came to be committed to writing; it became literature. Isaiah, after having been repelled by Jerusalem's leading circles, resolves to "bind up the testimony, seal the law among [i.e. either: in the presence of, or: in] my disciples" (Isa. 8:16).[2] A freer rendering in a modern language translation[3] of this verse reads, "I shall entrust God's warnings and instructions to those who listen

to me, so that they will be kept safe like money in a firmly tied purse." Why does he want to store God's word safely away? Because he counts on the future to confirm the truth of his prophecy. "And I will," the following verse reads, "wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will [expectantly] look for him."

This passage is the document of a psychological occurrence of serious consequences. Here something extraordinary is happening in the reality of the soul's life. The religious experience (the prophetic word) is not released into the world, not turned over to the prophet's age so that it could be as effectual or ineffectual as it might happen to be of its own accord. It is fixed and kept in reserve. It is sealed and safeguarded like money in a tightly closed purse. To release always also implies to relinquish. The spoken word, as released, has escaped. It is no longer in the speaker's control. The act of writing down, by contrast, keeps the word in the possession of the recipient of the revelation. Psychologically, the act of sealing has the effect of intensifying the word's power, because it concentrates and holds it back.

"And I will wait upon the Lord and will expectantly look for him." Isaiah obviously is waiting for the moment when the prophetic word that he received in his revelatory experience and historical, social reality will be brought to coincidence. As we heard in the second verse, God has hidden his face from his people. The prophet answers this concealment on the part of God by concealing and sealing his prophecy. The absolute insistence upon the truth of God's word, i.e. upon the exact congruence of personal religious experience and public reality, can in this way remain intact. It is simply unthinkable and unbearable—this seems to be Isaiah's feeling—that an archetypal experience, a vision or an auditory revelation, does not coincide with the reality of the people. What I have seen in a vision, *must* be fulfilled in external reality.

We see in Jeremiah how powerful the will to realization can be. Jeremiah "once accused his God outright of treachery"[4]: "wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" (Jer. 15:18). The experienced discrepancy between the word and reality is not simply endured. There is no dis-appointment, dis-illusionment or relativization, nor is there, as would have been characteristic of the mythical being-in-the-world, a distinction between archetypal and empirical truth, so that the one would merely be mirrored in the other without literally coinciding with it. Here there simply must be a coincidence. But because this demand for a coincidence if not fulfilled, it is displaced from the present into a distant future as the sole place where this coincidence might still have a chance: What *is* not true, can, nay shall, indeed *must* become true. Conversely, we could say that it is the invention of the future that is the way in which the will to an absolute hold on reality edifies itself.

We are witnessing here the birth of the future (*futurum*) out of the will to a literal realization of the content of a spiritual vision or archetypal

experience. This future, as the place of wishing, or rather of the will and demand for power, did not always exist. It was invented: *fabricated* through a clearly definable procedure. The method of this invention is that the spiritual experience of a given present is committed to writing and thus stored, preserved beyond its own present. Or rather: this one present itself is frozen. It is not allowed to naturally pass, to come to an end, to be succeeded by a new present. "Present" here does not mean the empty, abstract point of a "now" on the axis of linear time. Present is a certain quality, in our case it is the content of a particular religious experience. By locking up the content of this present (the world revealed to Isaiah) it thus becomes possible to extend and hold on to this present beyond its time. All future time will then only be the blown up, prolonged, *present* present, i.e. the present of then, of Isaiah's revelation, a present which could possibly be extended into infinity. The flow of original time is arrested. The advent (future as "the time to come" cf. German *Zukunft*: conventionally = "future," but literally "that which comes toward us") of new events, one new present after another, as well as of new revelations, is locked out, because this one conserved present is spread out in such a way that it takes on the role of all time, time as such.

Everything which occurs is thereby turned into a mere "moment" (in the sense of a constituent element, or step, or stage) in the unfolding of this one extended moment (in the temporal sense). Linear time, or time that governs out own sense of time and upon which our sciences (physics as well as history) rest, is an "artificial" product. It is the product of absolutizing one sole moment singled out of the flow of moments in original time. Just like God the creator left the ranks of mythical divinities, who had always been natural deities, deities *in* nature, and rose above all nature, setting himself up as the supernatural, extramundane creator of the natural world, so the single moment here rises above the natural stream of events and declares itself to be time itself, the only and true time. The time of physics and history, of astronomy and biological evolution is not really *the* time, not "true" time (*in* which there would of course also have to be an epoch of mythical thinking that for whatever reasons did not have an idea of linear time). Rather, it is only one moment of original time. This would force the realization upon us that astronomical and biological evolution and the history of the historians are no more than aspects of one single fixed moment. Physics, biology, astronomy, history are an elaboration and unfolding of the imaginal content of this one, qualitatively determined instant, which has been spread apart into infinite duration, whereas all other instants or presences (present moments characterized by a particular quality) have simultaneously been excluded.

We can also look at this from another point of view. If Isaiah had not stored up his revelation like jewelry in a bank safe, then other religious

experiences of a totally different nature could have happened to him or to those after him. In the mythologically constituted world, each present had its own god or myth as the inner image of its qualitative substance. Now was the moment of birth, of war, of love and begetting, of darkness, drought, harvest, illness, of the solstice festival, or what have you. Time was the advent of ever new archetypal situations, i.e., it was the manifestation of different gods, each appearing at his time and each having the unfolding of his nature in a particular myth. Isaiah, one might say, singles out one myth of the plenty of diverse myths, turning it into the sole myth, a super-myth. He claps this one, formerly intratemporal myth over time itself, so that from now on it will be the nature of time to be nothing but the unfolding of this single myth. The one moment or myth loses its eachness (each at, and for duration of, its appointed time) and becomes absolute.

It is as if one single poem of our entire literary history would be raised to the position of *the* poem, so that all other poems would have to be considered as mere explications or instances of individual aspects contained in this super-poem. Or it is what a popular understanding alleges the immanent intention of Hegel's philosophy to be: that philosophy of which all actual philosophems of the entire history of philosophy are only particular moments. Or it is like the developmental psychology of, e.g., Erich Neumann, which singles out one archetype (the Great Mother) from within the rank of all the many archetypes and deities and reduces all others either to her attendants or to mere phases in the development of this one archetypal principle.

The nature of time is turned inside out. In an act of usurpation, an internal "piece" of time declares itself to be time at large. Saving is the way a single present seizes power over all future and imposes on it its theme as the one and only theme. It is the way in which this theme, belonging to that one present, rises to the exclusive motivation operative in all "present moments" of history, moments however deprived of their true character as presences. The succession of ever different advents (different gods, moments, times) changes into the single ***heilsgeschichte*** of the monotheistic God. History ceases to be a stream of events and turns into one exclusive narrative, into the narration of a super-myth, which it is the task of our sciences to minutely elaborate and embellish. The one and only narrative has a beginning, as every story does, its *Genesis*, origin—be it "In the beginning was the Word" or "In the beginning was the Big Bang" or whatever, the one story having many versions and the course of its narration being still in process. And it has its ending (eschatology) as well as its linear and unambiguous course from beginning to end, the unerring hastening towards the end: so-called history.

This amounts to a transformation of the essence of future: instead of advent, epiphany, future now means fulfillment of the stored up, deferred

ending: apocalypse. In Christian terms, even advent itself is merely the advent of He who has long been expected, so that advent is deprived of its character as advent. For part of true advent is the arriving guest's foreignness, his unexpectedness, maybe also his uncanny or even assaulting reality.

Once one has understood this, one can see that the sciences are the telling of this single narrative, that is, that they are a myth, one single myth still in the process of its own construction and narration. This myth only appears to be *the* truth for the reason that we have absolutized *its* truth (that it has like any myth) or that we have succumbed to its being absolutized, which absolutization stems from a distant past. The content or message of *this* myth is the idea of the absolute. But this of course does not mean that the narrative *of* the absolute would also be the absolute narrative. By understanding this, we can see through the appearance that we have been taken in by, and we can slowly perhaps recognize modern physics, astronomy, the theory of evolution, the science of history as gigantic works of that literary genre called "fiction" or "belles lettres," and thus restore them to the soul, to imagination. In speaking of fiction I do not mean to say anything derogatory, for I do not have a low opinion of fiction. Also, I do not wish to suggest that the sciences did not, as they claim, come up with truths in the sense of reliable knowledge, but rather produced untenable fantasies. No doubt, the results of the sciences are, within the limits acknowledged by a responsible scientific attitude, indeed "true" (reliable). But: what we must do is take this unquestioned "truth" (of the scientific results) back into the imaginal: as *one* extended, prolonged moment of (from within) mythic imagination (time). By science fiction we understand a particular genre of novels, futuristic novels. But we begin to understand that the sciences themselves—the teachings and insights of our physicists, historians, etc.—are actual, literal science fiction, not despite, but on account of, their scientificity.

After having moved far from our starting point, a passage in Isaiah, I would like to come back to Isaiah in order to examine, in the light of our present discussion, what happens in his text. In Isa. 30:8, God commands Isaiah to write down His word. "Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be [more accurately: may serve as witness] for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord. . ."

Here we see the reaching out into the future. The written word shall become true some time in the future and then rise up as witness against those who did not participate in Isaiah's religious experience: God's word as time bomb for them. The reserving compacts and intensifies the content of this one experience into a bomb. This is important to note, for it helps us to distinguish the prophet's sealing his truth among his disciples from

the secrecy prevailing in mystery cults and men's secret societies. Whereas in those cults esoteric silence is an authentic purpose, the prophet still remains intent upon communicating (preaching) the word, and his silence merely serves the purpose of reaching a more overpowering, indeed an absolute dissemination in the end. The natural conditions of preaching with its contingencies (now more, now less success) is no longer acceptable for him. He wants so to speak and *Endlösung*, a definitive solution ("for ever and ever," i.e. once and for all).

The present and the distant future are being overarched by the one word of revelation. The future is not a different, fresh present (advent), but only the fulfillment of this present, the explosion of the stored up word into external reality. It is the final chapter of the narrative whose first chapter we witness with Isaiah's revelation. From now on, man and everything that is and happens takes place *in* time. Time has become an encompassing framework or container for everything that is, and everything that is in turn has "for the first time" turned into the Temporal, the Secular, whereas once, the phenomena and events occurred to man *as* time, *as* advent, epiphany.

Because Isaiah's actual present is only the inauguration of that new form of "present" that we could call history, and because it is essentially unfulfilled—for its fulfillment is expressly deferred to a distant time—existence in time becomes a waiting, an expectant looking for Him (Isa. 8:17). The qualitative moment is no longer in itself rounded and complete. The expectant waiting is the psychological reflex of the retained breath, and also the reflex of the fixed, arrested truth (present), which as arrested is prevented from exhausting and completing itself. Man's soul is put into the utmost tension, it receives a jet or rocket propulsion, because the completion of the narrative has yet to come, and the soul is by necessity totally committed to this distant goal; for the arrested moment, too, or rather especially, wants its completion. What the arrest does is to sunder the moment into it *archê* on the one hand and its *télos* on the other, and by distending them produce an immense internal tension corresponding to this nuclear fission. For this split has, like the split in a neurosis, the character of a dissociation: of a separation that occurs *within* a unity, but does not dissolve it. It has to be understood as the unity *of* separation (splitting, holding apart) *and* unity (holding together). This is a tension that, at the end of the Christian eon when it has receded from an objective spiritual level into the personal life and the subjective empirical feelings of the individual, has to be constantly reexperienced and re-enacted by means of thrilling novels or movies. One needs pastimes and diversions to kill the empty time between the severed halves of the one present arrested in its course and to make the endless waiting for the systematically deferred ending endurable. But conversely, one also needs them in order to have something to interpose between those two halves, and thereby to

constantly reenact the very holding apart that causes time to be empty, for without such constant reenactment the distended *archê* and *télos* would instantly collapse again.

At the time of mythic being-in-the-world, by contrast, thrillers and novels of suspense would have been unthinkable. For at that time, each present completed itself during its own time; it was released into its transience from the outset. Now *archê* and *télos* mark the borders (the beginning and ending *points*) at the opposite ends of the "line" of the phenomenon's duration. The "line" holds them apart as mutually exclusive opposites, but also simultaneously connects them. Originally they were not points, but were *ongoing* beginning, *ongoing* ending, and thus have to be imagined as two strands of a present—twin strands as inalienably connected as, say, those in the double helix of the DNA structure. To begin meant being in the process of ending, and, precisely by coming to an end, reaching consummation and perfection. And to cease to begin meant to be over, dead, bygone. This release into their ending amounted to an unconstrained self-expenditure on the part of the phenomena, to their splurgily giving themselves away, and thus to an ontological generosity. The conclusion was not preserved and sealed so as to explosively discharge, as it were, only "on the last pages of the novel." Being intent upon and released into its final end (its telos or archetypal image), each moment was ontologically and logically (not necessarily ontically) fulfilling from its very beginning and for its entire duration. No suspense. No saved up denouement. Now, by contrast, ontological miserliness rules.[5]

My paradigm for the constitution of time in the archaic situation is the race in the race course (*stádion*) of the early Olympic games. Such games and particularly the race seem to have had their origin in the cult of the dead and the funeral rites for heroes (like those for Patroklos described in the *Iliad*).[6] In racing towards the goal and into the finish, the runner visibly enacted, for every *theorós* to see, the meaning or sense of time and life. He ran into the transience of the race and into his exhaustion, symbolically into death. The connection between the race and death is born out by a much later terminology of the Greek physicians. They called the final stage of a terminal illness *tó stádion*, the race into the finish. But this finish did not just mean "over." It also meant fulfillment. For the runner was not simply finished with and by the race. He had arrived at his goal, on top of the altar of the god (Zeus) placed at the end of the race course. There he had to complete the sacrifice with which the race had begun by setting fire to the bloody pile of wood, earth and ashes of which this altar consisted, in order to burn the thigh pieces of the slaughtered sacrificial bull deposited there. The flames consummating the pieces of the sacrificed animal affirmed, indeed celebrated, at once death and the fulfillment of life. And as Cornford and others have argued, the cultic race ended in a Sacred Marriage, with

a divine transfiguration, in which the runner reached his consummation (*teleté*) and in which, by viewing it, all those present participated.

This is the point where, by way of an aside, we might at least point to the vista that is opened up by our present reflections on the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. If we hear that Derrida characterizes his own endeavors as a "prolonged hesitation," if we think of the place he attributes to writing (écriture) and to *différance*, deferral, if we also think of his claustrophobic[7] reading of Hegel and of the entire history of Western metaphysics which for him necessitates enmity towards any "presence," this may indicate to what extent his work may be bound by the pattern of thought inaugurated by the Old Testament prophets. The logical operation that in them showed itself only in and as their topic, as the particular objective reality they talked about (a literal distance between now and then as two separate ontic points in time), has in his thinking become—immensely sublimated, refined, and internalized—a style of consciousness or logical form ("deconstruction") in which any content whatsoever can now appear. And from the insight into the connection between present, death and archetypal fulfillment (*teleté*), the question emerges whether the attack on "presence" and the strategy of différance might not have the underlying psychological meaning of an attempt to have death forever deferred.[8]

According to what we have found out, it is not accidental that the Christian Occident's history book, the Bible, explosively discharges on its last pages in the book of Revelation (telling the story of the final breaking of the seals on the book sealed with seven seals), and that this particular revelation in turn happens to be of an apocalyptic (catastrophic) nature. The history of the Christian West, as the history of the saved up, arrested moment, had to run up to the apocalypse. The apocalypse, however, may now be conceived as the end of only this one moment, not as the end at large. As long as we fear the apocalyptic end of history through an atomic or environmental catastrophe as the absolute end, it is we who still equate this one moment of time with time at large, and thereby show to what extent we are blindly imprisoned in this single moment. The apocalypse, if it had occurred, would be the end of this imprisonment and the entrance into new moments, new presents.

The way our story is presented, it seems that Isaiah writes down and seals God's word because God remains hidden to the "rebellious, lying" people: sealing as the reaction to the refusal on the part of the people to listen and receive. But it may be more appropriate to conceive the sealing on the part of the prophet and the not hearing on the part of the people as two simultaneous sides of one and the same imaginal situation, in such a way however, that the holding back of the experienced truth has a certain logical priority within this simultaneity and that God's hiddenness for the people is its inner consequence. Maybe the particular present that Isaiah

was confronted with, and that still remains to be ours, is the one special present *of* written (and thus frozen) truth and of a fulfillment reserved or deferred for a day to come some distant time in the future. And only because it is such an arrested present is it also the present of the hiddenness of God (= the not hearing on the part of the people) and of the expectant waiting of his prophet during this emptied out time. Maybe the prophet also *needs* the "rebelliousness" of the people and their repelling him as a necessary ingredient of this particular archetypal fantasy in which he is caught up, in order to be given sufficient motivation and impetus for the truly revolutionary feat of effecting the transition from oral, transient word to written, positivized message by saving up the word and forming it into a time bomb.

If this were the case, it would mean that as long as the moment's truth is saved up and held back like money in a firmly tied purse (we could also say: as long as it remains fixed as a doctrine of faith, a metaphysical truth of philosophy or as a scientific truth), so long the fulfillment too would be promised ever anew "for the time to come for ever and ever," but that, precisely on account of its being saved up, it could never come to be; it would be postponed to the Greek calends, forever deferred. The essential unfulfillment of the expectant hope would be permanent. But conversely, it would also mean that fulfillment could only occur if the present were permitted to be transient and pass away, which is its innate tendency to begin with. The truth hidden in it would have to be released into the open and surrendered to its own free flow, expressly at the risk of its (and our) dying and fading away. This would be the restitution of truth to the poetics of being, the founding of reality in the abyss of psyche—of the imaginal.

Especially in Ezekiel there is a particular genre of prophetic verse that has been given the name *Erweiswort* (word of proof) by Walther Zimmerli.[9] In such passages there is first an announcement of a deed by Jahve, which is then followed by a statement of purpose (*"so that* ye shall know"). Ezek. 37:12-14: "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I *am* the Lord, *when* I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves. . .: *then* shall yet know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord." In such "words of proof," we see, with a clarity that leaves nothing to be desired, how one moment's nucleus (idea, archetypal content) is split and how its two fission products are stretched apart, as if they were an expander used for muscle building, so as to form a single arch across all future history. Now, in the present, we hear the advance announcement by God of a future deed. This is the one "half" of the moment, is *archê*, which is split off from its inherent *télos* and set to one side. And then there is the (future) redemption of this promise through the performance of the deed itself, which is to serve as

obvious proof that "I the Lord have spoken it and *[truly] performed it*." This is the other "half" of the same moment, its *télos* in which it finds its fulfillment. Just as the *archê* was set to one side, so is necessarily the split off *télos* too. The present announcement is true, but unreal because it is without its fulfillment, and the expected apocalypse will be real, but untrue because it will occur as a mere brutal fact having its divine, revelatory meaning outside itself in the announcement uttered millennia before. All time in between is the conjunction of the irreality and this untruth: utterly empty.

Because the particular deed announced here is the eschatological one of opening the graves and raising the dead, we know that the prophet is not reaching out for a limited time span, a period of so many years, decades, centuries within time, but for all time. Time as such is overarched and "pocketed." By setting up this tense arch stretched from the now of a promise to the then of its redemption at the end of, or beyond, all time, the prophets created the ontological frame or the archetypal schema for understanding history as one whole meaningful nexus in the sense of one narrative or one single drama. When Karl Jaspers wrote a book on the origin and goal of history, he could only do so because he resided within the one present split apart and distended by the prophets' achievements, and because this one present remained identical for him with time as such. But the science of history, too, and even physics are only possible on the ground made available by the situation established through the "word of proof": because the sequence of manifold real events can only be experienced as *one* self-contained nexus by virtue of the "word of proof," whereas in the natural situation each time had its own, ever fresh origin. There were many times. Time was a countable noun. And each time was a finite entity.

In addition to the superseding of time as such, there is another reason why in the Ezekiel passage quoted the genre of the *Erweiswort* thematically happens to speak of the envisioned resurrection of the bones of the dead and not about something else. What has been saved up, sealed, *buried* demands an explosive opening, an apocalypse. The method of locking up for the purpose of an intensified opening at the end of time is only the one side of an impulse whose other side is the thematic and eschatological concern for a hope of overcoming death. The method of deferring God's word through writing (and thus freezing, positivizing, "killing" it) is the path to the idea of Eternal Life. This method is indeed the instrument with which human existence could be heaved out of its natural attitude and transplanted into the attitude of an eschatological hoping. Simultaneously, there was a psychologically real translation of the definition of life from phenomenal eachness and transience into eternity and positivity (Eternal Life). Inasmuch as eschatological *hoping* for Eternal Life already *is*

resurrection from death, the act of storing up the word and freezing *its* life, by which act we are transported into hope, is in itself the word promising resurrection.

The prophets' story is one of bated breath. But bated breath here also means a long breath. Life ceased to be the constant, "monotonous" rhythm of inhaling and exhaling ever since Isaiah, by holding back his truth in a closed "purse," intercepted the exhaling. The long breath must then be what distinguishes the history thus originated. The tremendous range of one single time continuum is created by the retention of breath, by the ascetic abstention from exhaling. It is an extent of time that provided for Occidental man the possibility to continually work on the one opus of the construction of technical civilization. The mythical world was characterized by remembering *and* forgetting, Mnemosyne *and* Lethe, inhaling *and* exhaling. For this reason each individual present was too short to allow for a continuous cultural *development* across centuries in the sense of the "progress" that is typical of the Christian eon. In the mythical situation, there was not one single time as the container of all moments; each moment or phenomenon had its time, was *a* time, and a new moment or phenomenon was also the beginning of a new and different time. Because the moment here was not an element within the time continuum, but a discrete time in its own right, there was hardly a place for a longer continuity.[10] Each time was not only too short, but above all it *came* together with its "race" heading for its completion, its own apocalypse: the manifestation and experience of its imaginal meaning.

This was the pre-prophetic dynamics of phenomena. They orgiastically wasted themselves for no more than their archetypal meaning. They exhausted themselves for nothing but the display of their shine, with nothing left for those who had not been present, had not participated in the initiatory experience of them: no practical result, nothing *positive* to transmit to the next generation, nothing that could serve as a jump-off base for a progressive development. The next generation had to start all over again and do its own breathing-and-exhaling.

Only by applying to each new situation the archetypal schema conquered for mankind by the Old Testament prophets (and that is to say only by preventing each phenomenon or present from wasting itself on the shine of its "truth") could one hold on to something positive that would last beyond its time: the sealing of the moment's truth in a book logically stripped the moment of its epiphanic transience, abstracted and "rescued" it from its self-abandonment to its death = its visionary meaning. The moment was thereby reduced to its permanent abstract "information" aspect that could, apart from any *initiatory* epiphanic experience, be *intellectually* taught and learned and believed in faith or disputed in doubt.[11] As the frozen act of an exclusive inhaling, it was only apperceived

as a positive result (as a matter of act, not as a meaningful experience) and thus was able to serve as a base to build on. An entirely new dynamics had been created. The arrest of the moment's original dynamics unhooked it from the present of which it had been an integral and inalienable part and allowed its direction to be changed. Its energy that, if undisturbed, would have gone into the race towards its own finish is now used as a means to enable a civilization to push off from the previous generation's experience (now a priori only allowed to be perceived as fixed results) to new levels of civilization and consciousness. The dynamic is turned into that of a power engine to be utilized ever anew for the purposes of the one super-moment, the one linear narrative inaugurated by the prophets.[12] The industrious application of this power engine to every aspect of the world in science, technology and industry is that time-overarching dynamics that we call "progress." It allowed for the ever more comprehensive, ever more detailed subjugation of the world under the truth of the one arrested moment and for Western man's continually accelerating rise above, and divorce from, "nature."

As far as I can see, there are only four types of approaches to, or theories of, history as a whole: 1) the annalistic approach to be found in chronicles; 2) the cyclical conception of time, ideas of an eternal recurrence (probably modelled after the succession of day and night or after the recurring seasons of the year); 3) the degeneration theory, imagining history as a decline from the Golden Age or the Iron Age or to the Indian *kali yuga* (the model for this view probably being the biological ageing of us humans); and 4) the evolutionary or progress theory of history (inspired by the idea of the growth of plants or the growing up of children into adults).

We may now add a fifth view of history: the *involution* of all time into one of its moments. What from one point of view appeared as the usurpatory *rising* of one moment above all peer moments, can from another be seen through to be a monomaniac zooming in on this one single instant and the installation of all life, all time, all things and events within its narrow confines. This conception, however, demands of us some mental effort, a considerable stretching of the mind. What it is about cannot be perceived or pictorially imagined anymore. It can only be thought. We have to rise to the challenge of thinking the infinite expanse of open-ended linear time as having its place in an expansionless geometric point: history, which is above all the history of scientific and technological progress and of the incredible amassing of knowledge about all details of reality and of the penetration to ever more distant galaxies of the universe and to ever more microscopic recesses of matter—this expanding history as the ongoing collapse of the universe in a (in *the*) Black Hole.

Notes

1 This is a modified and expanded English version of a chapter ("Der Schuß und seine Bahn") of the author's book *Drachenkampf oder Initiation ins Nuklearzeitalter* (vol. 2 of his: *Psychoanalyse der Atombombe*), Zürich (Schweizer Speigel Verlag) 1989.

2 According to the traditional masoretic interpretation, the verb forms are understood as imperatives, God instructing the prophet to do what the verbs say. For grammatical as well as exegetical reasons, modern scholarship reads them as expressing something the prophet does from his own volition.

3 *Die Bibel in heutigem Deutsch. Die Gute Nachricht*. Stuttgart, 1982 (My trans.)

4 Hans Walter Wolff, "'So sprach Jahwe zu mir, als die Hand mich packte.' Was haben die Propheten erfahren?" In: *Herrenalber Texte* 51 (1984), pp. 9-21. (My trans.)

5 This is a statement about an ontological (or logical) state and should therefore not be heard as a moral evaluation.

6 There has been quite a debate on this subject. See e.g. E. N. Gardiner, *Olympia* (1925), pp. 63ff.; L. Drees, *Der Ursprung der Olympischen Spiele* (Beiträge zur Lehre und Foschung der Leibeserziehung 13), 1962; M. F. Cornford, "The origin of the Olympic games" in J. E. Harrison, *Themis* (1912), pp. 212ff. Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, Berlin & New York (de Gruyter) 1972, pp. 108-119.

7 I am indebted for this formulation to James Hersh.

8 This question might impress itself on us even more later when we come to a discussion of an Ezekiel passage showing the connection between the deferral of fulfillment and the longing for an overcoming of death and for Eternal Life.

9 W. Zimmerli, "Das Wort des göttlichen Selbsterweises (Erweiswort), eine prophetische Gattung." In: *Mélanges Bibliques rédigés en l'bonneur de A. Robert*, 1957, pp. 154-164.

10 Instead of that continuity allowing developmental progress, archaic peoples had a different kind of continuity: *tradition*, a continuity of *meaning*.

11 Both, religious believing and scientific knowing depend on the positivization of truth as the written word. An epiphany could not possibly be "believed" in. It was an *experience*, which means that as *logically transient* (not positive, not "written") it "passed through" the experiencing person fulfilling and illuminating him in its passage.

12 This is made very clear in the Ezekiel passage: The fulfillment of God's promise at the end of time has not the quality of a purposeless *shine* of meaning, but has an external and positive purpose—that of "serving as [factual] *proof*," of winning an argument.

GUSTAF SOBIN
TWO POEMS

TRANSPARENT ITINERARIES: 1991

were no origins (so we were told), only ends.

nowhere, really, to reach except those occasional places in
which —sometimes— we'd orchestrate those ends. set their emptiness —in measured bars, volutes, ellipses— to sound.

those hill villages, for instance, each autumn, only days after they'd been abandoned.

still, after so much depredation, an ocherous rose.

language, making metaphor as it does out of a fundamentally metaphoric existence, has —at least— the power of its own reversibility

"you," it would seem, more *place*, at first, than *person*. (there, for example, where the shadows —in foaming— as if seethed).

existing —as we do— in so much myriad reflection.

—flamboyant shell—

---

nearer, certainly, you would have
vanished; further, we'd
never have known
that —for hours at a time— we'd
had the same name.

---

otherwise, endless as the air itself. as wind, the consistency
of soot.

only the glint, you said, wasn't incidental. only the glint,
occasionally, glowed (or seemed to).

"seemed to," I repeat, observing —thus— that spent usage.

—you, who'd always be just an instant earlier—

---

within your gaze, would
turn; in your long fingers,

root.

composed, as we are, of creases. of creases and appendages.
or so, at least, we'd like to think.

oh, how many hallucinated cells within a single, predetermined
body.

. . .the mirage of how many rocks. . .

where a distance —once— preserved us.

kept us primed —as if essential— within its invisible quiver.

(what, awakened, the organs first rose toward).

its icons invested with breath: *our breath*. what held us —for
so long— out of reach of our own dismantling.

flexed interval.

what, with each new appropriation, had only receded. had nearly vanished, now, into an "already-after."

worn tokens; gutted sums.

"seeking to conquer a larger liberty, man," according to Melville, had but extended "the empire of necessity."

. . .in which, not even gagged, a gratuity of sounds. . .

---

would wrestle in
    these shadows for that
light, that
luster, for those
blown drops driven —incandescent— past so
much extinguished
mirror.

---

as if cupped, irrecuperative.

an alcove in air!

where, otherwise, had gone on vanishing in the very midst of so much acquisition. in the very heart of its compressed metals.

---

mother of no one, as
woman you
enter, occupy nothing, but stand, water-
slick in the midst of these pitted
whispers, no one's, once
again.

THE VILLAS OF ANDREA PALLADIO

there, once again, at the
world's
very edge, you're
pointing out palaces, aren't
you? tapping

at that viscous
glass, holding them, the
im-

memoràbile, at the
tip

of your lacquered
nail. there, just there, where the
barge pivots, seems to
station in the
midst

of its own vapors. "see
it?" you

ask. I see
your lacquered nail, its

wavering
reflection, follow it

across
those stalled waters. *pier, pilaster,*
fronton, the pure
scale

of so much
hal-

lucinatory mass. (not even a
hedgerow to
break the

effect, not even
a stray dog, the ragged line of
its
leash).

*

null, in so
many
numbers, isn't this
    what you mean? this, that's
meant? blown
mirrors, the void
in

which, turgid, our
viscera

would glow? among the
room,
rooms, the
words empty —spacious— enough
to

withhold us? isn't
this, that's
nothing, what the
    cells —wedging— would jam?

*

billows about you, a
scarf of
clouds, pigeons. yes, a sudden
air
of apparent
be-

wilderment. tell, tell
me to my-

self, before even
you
get swept
into that wash of sounds, the
lagoon, al-

ready, in a
sputter
of tugs, marked by so

many rigorously
aligned
pilings. yes, before
our
own breath hardens
a-

bout its very
words, and our bodies, once
again, beat

against the
muslins of their veiled reflections.

DAVID HINTON
TWO POEMS

WINDOW

To hear rain
falling in familiar
streets is to
long for
the sound of rain
falling in familiar
streets. Nothing

to lose, I hold it
gently as untouched
peach blossoms
among broken
glass—and yet,
nothing, earth's

empty genealogies, its
clear, deep-sky
window. Return us
to shadow, to song-

shadow names
cast—*moon*, twice-
sized setting
moon. O bright
seed of darkness.

WILD APPLES

All clarity snow
darkens and cannot
touch. . . . These
figures of speech
identify. It is

no doubt
true mind
began in that
space names
open, and seeing

through the figures
names take, seeing
through mind's very
etymologies (restoring
ponder to market
scales, *consider* to
stars), pilgrims

burn the world
down to that
immaculate
solitude, that perfectly
empty, unborn

mind. But an early
snow fell last
night, and this clear
autumn sky
seems endless. For now
at least, I'll stay

here beside this
snow-darkened
lake all clarity
looking in. I'll

journey no further
than the familiar,

long-abandoned
orchard, savor that
articulate
century of weather
distilled in the peppery
taste of wild

apples. Tangled
branches cragged
beneath winters of heavy
snow, lichen-encrusted
trunks gnarled
around sudden mountain
thunderstorms—what occurs

keeps working
further and further
into its own
voice, its own private
language each

walk I
take. It is not
a truth of words,
but the unanswerable
image they

occupy. *Wild*
apples, perhaps,
or the sheer
completion we
sustain of a language

itself, where
our touch our
separations are
lost to themselves.

CLAUDIA KEELAN
TWO POEMS

THE QUEEN OF TRAGEDY, AWAKE FROM THE BASEMENT

Indentured to the stages of sleep,
I spun into his REM's,

bellied the rat infested
tunnel to a lesser field

of breath, no net, no tool
to help us through. Where we were,

metronome of burning water,
no word for. Only the smallest

of us access tunnels, wet
translators of snarls, monitors

of the distance made from our shadows;
we'd never been closer. How I wanted

no flesh then, longed to peel
him down to grip the axe

missing with precise abandon
the clotted trees between us

and day. On Penyrile Pkwy,
a white sign: Prepare to meet God.

I lower my teeth to his chest and tear:
a helicopter squats the airfield,

machete arms polished and ready
to lift us away from here.

INCEST

Bashed into the street side window, a little blood,
cardinal stigmata, red cloud wafting
wants a beak in my mouth wants, oh a small

beak just inside my lip's soft inside.
Updrafting, 'gainst my country window—
an apple's star, nail pricks, lipstick muscle

what's the difference? Your tunnel calling
and I always stuff myself there. May I call you father?

I've forgotten why the menstrual smeared
trees go by different names. Their early acorns

sucked the wet from inside clouds
and the things I promised you there dryly

vanished too. Why are we always underground?
I want you to figure me in the pissing glow

right here. Oh riddle the lamplight with our under
-ness. Render the fucking master

orb sightless. Our cardinal's ordinary
suicide cries love me here

KAREN KELLEY
MAP OF HEAVEN (LETTER TO JUSTIN)

dream of a hot, dry wind.

come over and stand right up against me, your thigh between my legs.

something about matches. funny, there're no candles or lights. your foot tangled in the strap of my purse. I'm pulling, somewhat seductively.

do you have on high heels or is it my foot I see?

people watching say, "They can only move when there's a wind." but it's more a matter of something fierce, indefinite, unstated.

now they've left without me—screen door open, dock empty. no, there's one boat—a transparent green boat—and I wish it weren't there, wish we were stranded.

reread. reading a few times to see if it says "rape." *the manifestations of happiness and darkness are* [indecipherable].

cut to a restaurant. you are Mark, working as a cook. I am with you, but not acquisitively so. hotel bathroom. is it for men or women? we just want to find a place to have sex. the words I wake to each morning a pink neon sign over the bed: *sexual desire and "romance" melt away, revealing a truer kind of love.*

huh?

the tide comes in. I'm near the shore, my hand on a ledge, but can't pull myself up.

you wake and I lie down half on the bed, wondering if they'll be shocked because I'm looking you straight in the eye. what brings me to watch you touch your cock, disturbing and vertiginous pleasure heavier than air?

mysterious landscape of weeds and brambles. we're figures on a hill, looking for *what?*

finally choose a shelf way out in the backyard and put the evidence in. continual worry about this. the dirt will wear down and the box rise to the surface. all the things we've done to each other lenses with frosted bifocal areas that obscure my vision and as I walk create a strobe effect.

"where're your underwear?"

now you are Patrick, who's taken apart my mailbox. there's whipped cream inside which we wipe out with paper towels.

I have a hard time remembering this is just a simulated reality.

you're using sex as stationery, a portion of your letter experimental fiction. about the clot of blood on my finger. how it's wrong to cut the cake before guests arrive.

when I shut the door I see the walls and ceiling stained with pee. I'm laughing, then realize you're right here.

you want to insist that the transition from ***it's killing me not to write about this*** to lace panties hidden in my pocket proves that all time is a china cup falling, smashing to bits, reassembling itself, and flying away. that the body's main purpose is to unfurl like the principal sail of the vessel of consciousness.

and I in my baby dolls enjoy your finger in my mouth.

without looking I know the stockings I'm intending to use are the correct ones. I know the things about to occur.

it is late at night and I don't know if I want to get involved.

what do *you* want? buttered toast? dollar bills? the meat in the pan? lots of books? monogamy? modest photos of yourself no one else will ever see?

maybe your black leather Zorro suit or the lighting system and cameras over the bed. the fact that I can slide under the table or cut through the grassy wash. wet and mucky.

your leg indicates tenderness, but your hands and eyes are furnaces and freezers—some gutted, some humming. you spin me around as if giving me a plane ride, whirling violently.

my compliance like eating a piece of cake.

like the upstairs bathroom leaking.

as I mouth any word at all, feelings kick in incontrovertibly, like bales of weeds. of these I make three "beds," drawing shapes V V under sheets we can see through (suggesting closed eyes, breasts.) "no," I say, "use my name."

I am hearing a tape of myself speaking. we must comment on the "tone," get a sense of it—despair, no doubt. you're still baffled. how can you comment on a book you haven't read?

(make love. this is secret.)

push it down around my waist. you ought to like that.

fragment: my jaw coming apart. also the image of a woman dancing on one foot. not enough heat. I look out the window and see a medieval cityscape, very Breughel. a city on the edge of the sea, ships going out.

now we're in the desert, warm with our [indecipherable].

you want to go deeper. "she" is an inanimate object I carry around. she is representational, though close-to her marks are, like Bacon's, not illustrative. beautifully painted.

of a woman riding in a war-circle.

her back outlined in black like parentheses, then filled in with ochre.

I'm dotting the bottom edge of the bridge of her nose with orange paint. it turns yellow. the paint is changing in other jars and cans. you dip into what seems to be hips, they turn to waist. canvas shows through. *what comes next?*

lush Indian clothes and a very beautiful ankle bracelet. the picture is huge and distorted, I'm so close. members of the audience yelling. these questions seem rather personal. *(a hard-on you're trying to hide?* I wonder).

the corners full of cobwebs and industrial soot. some fragment about pink handmade paper.

now you are yourself. Justin and I looking out the front door. strong sexual tension I enjoy.

black mess of mountain wilderness, mooncast shadows, stars

hair curls around your face like bedsheets, drowned Ophelia.

you start reading your list: small rowboat, shaky dock, image of a coastal landscape, vivid pink lipstick that stains my lips, eyeshadow that goes on like black paste—no brush, we use our fingers.

I love this run-down seaside hotel, where you are the image of stepping back into tall grass, a way of seeing the mouth as a sweet that brings grief.

we sit in the moat with its strong circular current and spread out, flatten, and separate into irreversible successions of red blood cells, profane suggestions, and significances from shape (brightest) through independence (faintest visible).

the interminable light your body gives off from throat to belly slips easily along my cord of pleasure and purpose. I'm back in the room, surprised you've paid for it overnight. two bare mattresses, a couple of upholstered chairs, a couch covered with dingy yellow and brown blankets.

changing out of my suit, worried someone's going to come in.

are these little games high-friction fulcrums for very small, often imperceptible fears (frequently decorated with a human face)?

the little I do allow myself is always too overwhelming.

all I'm wearing is the white towel, my clothing flooded with water, swampy up to my ankles.

I know it is my job to strip and join you in your room.

finally it will be clear who has been hearing out of which ear, and to whom the breath in this close room belongs. scents of the sea choke me, thick waxy smells as if I am in a deep cavity, the vibrations a result of proximity to the artery of true feeling.

all my lingerie and nightgowns. why are they here?

shirred stretch tops and drop waists

will I get sent home if I wear one? beautiful sky blue halter, back a mess of white cross-stitches, mended very awkwardly. the front laces up. I wish

I could wear this (puffs out like a crinoline, the skirt unevenly reattached after a rip).

other people sit at tiled booths that smell like public pools or the bathrooms of beach houses. my dress (light blue, though now the background color is darker and the print a lurid wavering) does not match my belt. on a pad: notes, intimations.

cryptic—what exactly am I saying?

can't seem to remember from moment to moment. it is a continually unfinished project, and ridiculously inadequate to its purpose.

sound of you reading.

a wet spot between your legs as if you are a woman, not a man. confused. long row of stalls, pools of water on the floor and I have no shoes.

view of the scene from under the table: dim room with the washing machine, cactuses in pots stuck to counters, something sticky leaking around them. I'm dying to pee.

fragment: we're on top of a tower. look down and it is impossible to see the ground, just a greenish haze that brings us back in time to the Dark Ages. glass window running the length of the door. narrow shade I pull

the room filled with dust. you are The Devil looking in.

a hoof under the divider.

you use the point of a pencil to rub my temple—hard—after each suggestion. ask, "why am I doing this?" it's about hypnotism and the dispersal of pain. my own fears touching me with your hand. my pants around my ankles and you slip your hoof into one leg. start saying how much you like me.

"leave your side of the door unlocked."

feelings arise in my body in response to the paradox of holding dreams for defense. image of hard, close-grained panties six inches in depth with large mouths and The Devil's handwriting: *WHAT SPRINGS FROM THESE?*

an avalanche of impulsive acts stressing rugs lying askew.

a hollow funnel at the center of the page.

an internal vestigial waist and hips like a sign over the door—half shapely figure, half horse with good action: Karen. your eyes look dangerous, a tumult of inaccessible locations.

locate the comedy: *I infect you with a tight black slip* or: *I keep confusing what I touch with what I wish* or: *one word can make me martyr to a wild course with magnified foliage.*

fragrant grasses, trees, flowers.

damp steps of a sharply pitched amphitheater. what I consider erotic an uncertainty about routes which I want but can't afford.

now you are Don. our assignment to listen to cells firing away: *pop, pop, pop, pop!* and do interpretive paintings. it is clear I am going to sleep with you, though the other women call you Paul.

unwrapping your turban until I'm left with you asleep, nude under a blanket of gauze.

now you're Marlon Brando in very pointed gray snakeskin cowboy boots. I start getting myself ready. incoherent instructions about pleasure, then you disappear.

dramatic burst of music outside the frosted glass door.

hazy image of you as Brando with an untranslatable face. you are chatting me up a little, are unable.

a couple of puddles.

to put you on the oily satin comforter you've slept in for years eludes my grasp. this shot as if I'm much taller, my head up on the ceiling.

I am hearing every thought hidden inside you in words that cannot be used because they are a bronze canopy over what is initially a landscape of poor definition and unsurpassable intensity, then turn into a bed you're adjusting for me.

now you are a ruined industrial plant, labyrinthine.

suddenly unclear whether we ever slept together, whether a ghost and a physical being can have a child. still, she is lying curled up against you, the weight of the sea running from the top of her forehead to the base of her chin and from ear to ear.

emotional realities that cannot be so easily deciphered. as if we are made "sideways."

in one of the layers and layers I see you shuck off your face and laugh the laugh I hear, though what I see is a close-up of the involuted shell of your ear, listening. a delirium of sharp focus.

examples of other people's self-portraits line the walls.

I see our ribs glow, I see lacy cartilage chambers growing around our hearts.

now I am in love with you. in a tall tree. others in trees around us.

below us the forest is burning.

now you are Russell, cutting a piece of steel. smell of burning rust, creamy glow of metal. I am Renoir's lover, lying on a bed as he unravels, interests and loves waning. wake but leave my eyes closed. trying to remember if there are any explicit sexual scenes.

thunderstorms.

corridors mottled blue.

gardens, parks, ponds. layers of facades, cornice of the roof across the street. rooms gutted, floors removed, and ceilings. looking down into this pit of rubble loosens the grip of obscure emotions.

it doesn't matter where you start.

you must have faith.

flying over tar-roofed buildings. this is unmapped territory. you are a Chinese man asleep on one building. often you come to the library with

no walls and I try to see the authors of books you read, thinking you might read your own and then I'll know your name again.

marble wall of elegant swans and a sign so far overhead it's almost impossible to read: *Gabriel.* you have no hard-on and I am ashamed for spying but can't bring myself to leave.

tell me I'd better get you excited, throw your head back as you say it. gravy spills down my naked legs. you look inside and say I can't not have it because it already has feet.

a woman pretending to be me until I can escape.

I see your foot and ankle much smaller than mine. some kind of sexual experiment that includes lighting the couch on fire. I take your breast in my mouth, suck, feel the tickle in my breast. I want to touch lower, but you move out of reach.

all kinds of scents on your counter. jewelry box. tangled earrings—one pair out of antique spoons. long hammered silver drops. a pair with opals at the top and bottom. loose opals draining through my fingers.

wooden railing my arm's around.

now you are. . .now you are—?

coaching me to lean into the spreading wings and tail of heaven. very reluctant to try this move. the railing detaches. image of myself pulling the ripcord—actually your cock and balls detached from your body.

so that's what you are using.

R.D. SHIPP
THREE POEMS

TWIN COUSINS TO THE MARTYR

The short man wears his lack
like an extra foot and thunders

upstairs as though the noise

emanating from his frame defied
his brief stature.

Madness is meaning impacted

through words which abnormally lodge
in the jaw, as when the short man apologizes:

"I just don't know when to stop."

The invocation of order is versed
in a system of denial.

Order is the imposition of will

over chaos. The nun, released
from her order grasps my arm,

"You mustn't wear this at night,"

she says, fingering my long, black scarf,
"It will tempt."

Oh, how insanely heavy

the multi-tailed, vastly taloned creature is,
lashed within me.

Each of my fingers

is a fork in one tongue.
My brow bubbles—my chest heaves,

my eyes blacken,

my fingers shrivel,
my lips roll back up my face.

The beast beating my breast bursts forth

in a spray of humours: phlegm, bile
and spittle arching high as sea foam

off waves against rocks

and my shell, loosened from the vise of order
dissolves into a lightly skinned pool,

a small body of water

hosting whole colonies of diaphanously winged,
long-legged creatures simultaneously feeding

off the elements within.

S&M

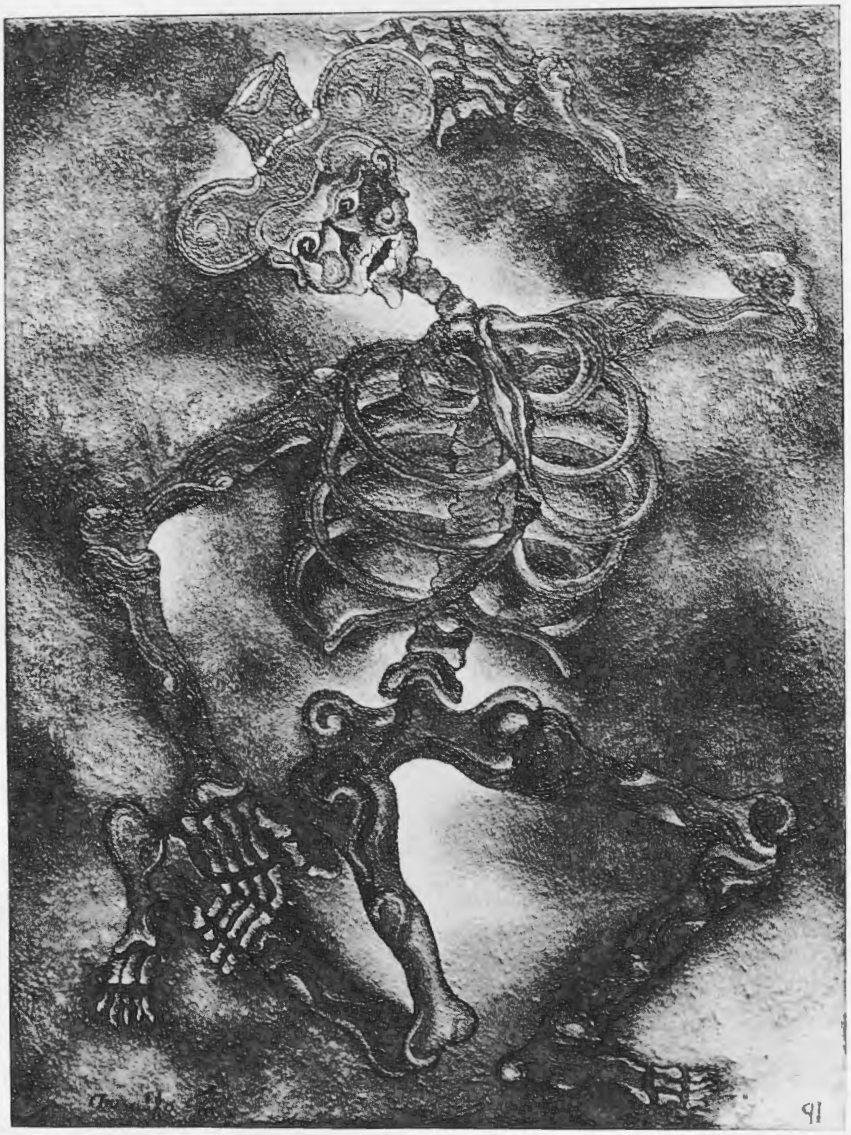
I put my knife down and the coffee cup spins beside it.
As the clouds part, filling the room with white light,
the little cat yawns and settles into the couch cushions.
The old cut in my thigh has opened up again, the swelling
around it like the stain on a child's grinning mouth,
after eating fresh raspberries. When I was a child,
my uncles tricked my mother—convinced her they'd forgotten me,
left me behind at the circus. I stayed under the stairs
for a long time, listening to my mothers cries while the edge
of a wooden crate dug softly into my back. As I twirl
the safety pin piercing my left nipple, a little bourbon
drips down my chest and pools into the folds of my belly.
Soon, it will be time to go out and use this joyous body
I get to heal and heal again.

INDUSTRY

At fifteen, when my sex was still a small hard bud, I went
to Sunday School class wearing a lime green granny gown,
with pink flowers and butterfly sleeves, a piece of eyelet lace
sewed on top of the bodice, hiding any sign of cleavage.
Our Sunday School teacher wore a white linen suit and had a
beehive
hair-do which spoke well of somebody's incredible handiwork:
teasing, styling, curling and spraying. It stood as grand a symbol
of industry as the other beehive, Utah's state symbol,
the emblem we display on our road signs. She brought a white
rose,

in a silver vase. "Girls," she said, running her hand along the side
of the vase, "this rose is like your pure bodies are now:
fresh and untouched." Then, with sadness, she caressed several
petals,
rubbed them between her fingers, ground her thumb into the
stem,
the petals tore and fell off as she probed into the bloom, her
finger,
tentative at first, then growing more aggressive, thrusting deep
into
the flower. Her lips loosened, beads of sweat formed above
them.
The rose lay in shreds around the vase, the petals remaining,
stuck out,
stark and brown, her face glowed and she sighed, giving the
rose
a fierce, final clench. "This," she explained, "is what happens
to you if ever, you let a boy touch you." And, indeed,
when I woke with you today, our clothes scattered around us,
like petals, there were purple marks on my neck and bruises on
my thighs.
I look at you, sleeping, turned away from me, sweet lover,
whom I do not love and I trace a pattern on your back, playing
connect-the-dots with your freckles and you turn into me,
smiling.
You begin your work on me, much friction and serious effort.
You move
your hands and mouth industriously over me, my body marked,
marking time.

ARNULFO MENDOZA
FIVE WORKS

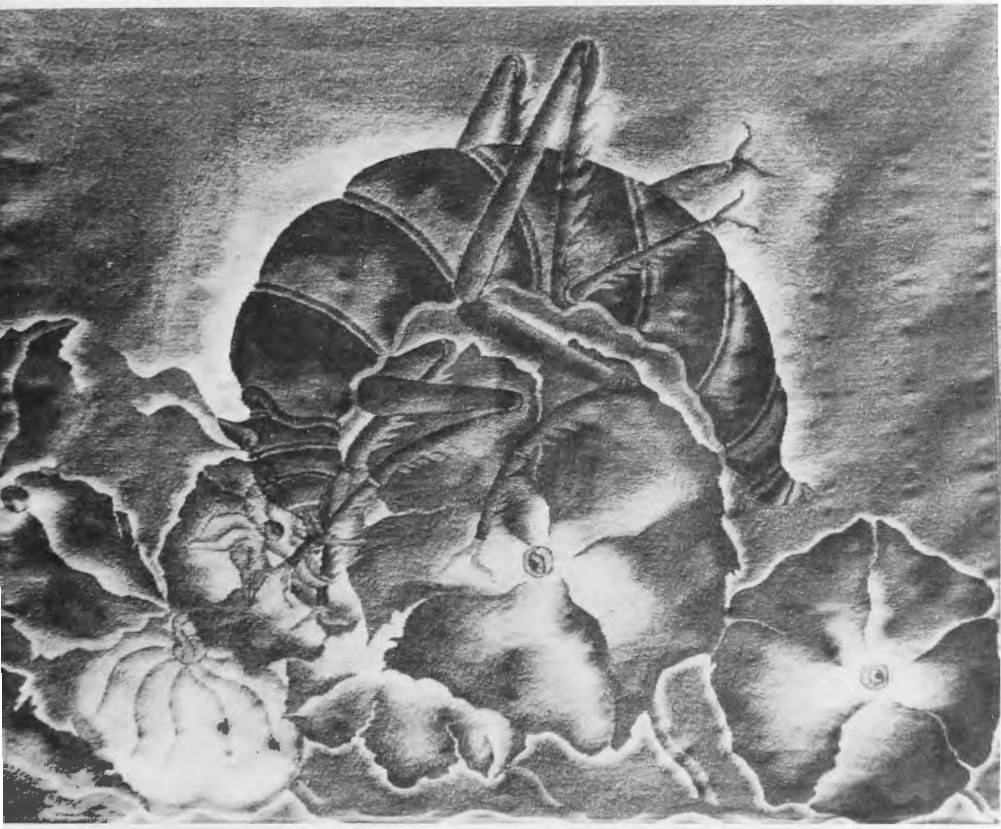


LA CALACA IV (Skeleton IV)

Oil on canvas, 25" x 34"
1991

EL CAMARON (The Shrimp)

Gouache on paper, 30" x 44"
1989 diptych



EL CHAPULIN Y LA FLOR DE CALABAZA
(The Grasshopper and the Squash)

Wool tapestry, 60" x 52"
1988

EL VIAJE CELESTIAL
(The Celestial Journey)

Gouache collage on amate paper,
60" x 68", 1989

EL VENADO NAHUAL (The Deer Nahual)

Gouache on amate paper, 22" x 30"
1989

RUSSELL ELLISON

ARNULFO MENDOZA: LEARNING FROM TIME

Arnulfo Mendoza is sitting at the drawing table in his 17th Century studio in Oaxaca, Mexico. The mid-morning light is coming through the heavy wooden shutters of the balcony, the sounds of the city drift up from the street below. He is bending over the surface of the painting which he has carefully built up with marble dust mixed with pigment. Slowly, precisely, he inscribes the curls and spirals on the tail of a fish, mirroring the movement of the surrounding waves in which it swims.

The painting is only partially finished. The figures are all in place, already on their perpetual voyage across the canvas. The mermaid is riding a giant fish, her voluptuous tail clinging to the side of the leaping sea creature. In her left hand, she holds the outline of something, some form which moves from her fingers like a scorpion, its frenzied legs waiting for color and detail to come to life. Perhaps she is pouring the water of life into the ocean. Her right hand to her breast, she looks over her shoulder at a figure of a bird that is outlined but not yet detailed; a bird diving into the ocean or falling from the sky. It may be the bluebird that carried the secrets of civilization to the Zapotec Indians or the bright eagle that brought the gods to the land of Mexico. Below the bird, the ocean is becoming alive with exuberant marine shapes jumping from the surface of a teeming sea. Even at this stage of completion, the whole world of the painting is hurling itself through the confined space.

Mendoza's paintings are opera. The backdrops are glowing scrims moving with luminous colors; the action is theatrical; the figures move to the rhythm of softly heard drums and the melodies of bamboo flutes. Like the floating dream figures in Chagall, they listen to the sounds coming naturally from the ground and the sky. In his Zapotec conception, all the elements of the earth move together in a perpetual dance. It is a Gnostic world where duality and transformation exist in the secret wisdom of the Nahual. Every human has a corresponding animal soul, life exists with death, and male and female intertwine to keep the earth in balance.

In one watercolor, *El Camarón*, a giant shrimp fills the frame. The animal is alive, threatening to move off the paper and into the room like a monster from a Japanese film, flailing its thousand legs through the shining water. The water is luminescent, radiating light from the world of the surface in blues, browns and white. A reflection shines from its reddish shell and the eye of the creature looks out on its domain with primordial knowledge.

His colors come from the natural tones of the Mexican soil: flaming reds of the cochineal insect and royal purple of the caracole shellfish; blue-black of the indigo plant and tan and red of the bark of logwood and Brazil-wood; orange annatto and green-gold manzanilla.

Leaning unframed against the wall is a recently finished painting. A fantastic nursing creature offers her bursting teats to her infant companion. The beast has the ears of a rabbit, the body of a cow and the feet of a cat. The sun radiates fiery spirals, clouds churn in baroque curves, the ground moves in slow molten pleasure.

The surface of his recent works are becoming increasingly important, reflecting in microcosm the swirling design of his perpetually transforming world. In Mendoza's paintings, all lines can be expressed in curves. The pattern of the glyphs from Monte Alban can be seen in the flamboyant loops of a siren's fin. The pre-Hispanic spindle whorls are duplicated in the foam of the waves.

A painting of the Madonna, done in Paris early in his career, shows a woman sitting on a chair holding a rabbit—not a child—in her arms. She is looking over her right shoulder, away from the blind eyes of the animal which hangs awkwardly from her caressing fingers. Already Mendoza was beginning to mold sinuous shadows around his subject but the surface of this work is smooth and flat; the pose is formal, the legs of the chair and the woman seem to be slightly contorted to avoid slipping from the defining frame of the canvas. From this time, Mendoza remembers a moment of revelation when he first saw the works of Van Gogh, whose freedom of movement and tumultuous brush strokes gave Mendoza a glimpse into the unconscious imagery of his thousand century heritage. Years later, at the Metropolitan Museum's exhibit of Mexican art, he would trace the line of this artistic development to his own baroque surfaces reflected in the incised adornment of the ancient carvings.

Mendoza also weaves his images in wool and silk tapestries, summoning the techniques of his childhood in glimpses of his intimate world. In *El chapulín de la flor de calabaza*, on a deep blue background, a rust colored

grasshopper curls lovingly over a brown and yellow squash blossom in a state of carpophagous stasis. In another tapestry, *El Viaje Amoroso*, a woman, her feet transforming themselves into fins, caresses a fish that reaches back with its serpentine tongue to lick her face while beneath them another sea creature moves through deep blue ribbons of water.

Mendoza has discovered a world in which the remnants of a mythological time have blended with mundane affairs. There is light in his colors, motion in the shapes, delicacy in the ideas and images and, ultimately, an astonishing passion for the eye that moves with a craving for comprehension.

In his lifetime, Arnulfo Mendoza has moved from one epoch to another. His village of Teotitlan is set in the middle of the smudged green fields of the Oaxaca valley, tight against the Sierra de Zempoaltepetl mountains, a magic place that has been the home of ancient kings and older gods. On the dark peak above the village, Zaquia, the bird of the sun came to a cave and gave oracles to the priests, speaking in a tongue filled with the sounds of the wind and the trees. There is an enchanted stone in the village called Piedra Morada which, today, no one goes near when it is dark.

There have always been weavers there, fashioning cloth in agave, cotton and, later, wool. As the eldest son of the Mendoza family, he learned from his father, Emiliano, the traditional techniques of spinning and dying, and at an early age he was weaving the patterns that had been preserved from the past. As a young teenager, he began to create new motifs based on the Pre-Hispanic codices, attracting the attention of the well-known artist Francisco Toledo who was working with Emiliano on a series of tapestries. At Toledo's urging he attended the Oaxaca branch of the Belles Artes, Mexico's national arts institute. After graduating, he continued his development by becoming part of the newly formed group known as the Taller Rufino Tamayo. Under the guidance of Roberto Donis, Mendoza and other young artists including Cecilio Sanchez, Maximino Javier, Filemon Santiago, Ariel Mendoza and Felipe Morales spent five years working, eating and living together. The collective work resulted in the development of the school of Oaxacan painting that became known as "magical surrealism" and whose influence can still be seen in the varied styles of the artists who came from that crucible of creative experimentation.

What is it about Oaxaca that provides so much inspiration for the plastic artist: tradition, history, magic? The high culture of Mesoamerica began in the Oaxaca valley which for 30 centuries has been home to the most civilized, cosmopolitan people in the world. It was here that Quetzalcoatl—

the plumed serpent—brought the gift of civilization to the land, that the spirits of the animals and the plants taught the refinements of society and the epics of the gods described the scope of the universe.

Before Greece and Rome, the people of the valley were carving sacred and profane figures in stone, painting murals of the legendary stories on the walls of brightly painted temples, drawing the history of the kings in the resplendent codices on bark. The creative impulse continued into colonial times. In the 17th century, Miguel Cabrera painted the portraits of the intricate social classes of the time with great elegance. In the early part of the 20th century Rufino Tamayo confronted the historical muralists with the images of the unconscious. Rudolfo Nieto, dying young in Europe, abstracted the symbols of the Zapotecs into monochrome compositions. Francisco Toledo found the impulse of the ancient style and transformed it into the shared myths of contemporary reality.

The beliefs and ideas evolved through the centuries of Zapotecs living and worshipping in the valley have stayed close to the land, creating thought forms that are tangible and forceful. They move like a benign form of radiation dusting the objects and the people of Oaxaca with invisible light, drifting imperceptibly through their thoughts, generating ancient images of the earth. They revive in us the memory of the land from which we came, the vision of which is hidden spellbound in the world surrounding us.

Everything and nothing has changed. There are different names for the festivals now but the rites of fasting, confession and absolution, celibacy and baptism are part of the old religion. The cross still stands for an ancient token of space-time. Auguries are still made by the pattern of corn cast on a mat or by observing the flight of birds and their songs.

Mendoza is an interpreter of the ancient ways of the earth to the modern viewer. He has made the transition from one culture to another, following the journey made by Mexico in this century. As a child he was surrounded by the passion of the Oaxaca valley; the light and color of the land, the tales of the gods and the living stories of the creation of the people. As a student in Oaxaca he learned of the traditions and techniques of modern art and civilization. As a man he has become aware of the rupture of modern man from his society. In his work he shows us the continuing spirit of the people in the face of the current disassociation of our lives.

RAINER MARIA RILKE
TESTAMENT

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris)

To grasp his situation at the close of that winter, one has to look back to the summer of nineteen fourteen. The outbreak of the foul war which disfigured the world for the span of many human lifetimes, kept him from returning to that incomparable city to which he owed the greatest part of his possibilities. There now began an endless waiting period in a country with which he was connected only through the language—though, having lived in many different countries, he had made even that language serve his innermost tasks to such an extent that for some time now he was permitted to consider it the pure and independent material of his creations.

The relation to that friend, in whose special abilities he had also hoped to find the doctor he needed so badly at the time, had grown weaker and all but disappeared on the day this man—so strangely and totally devoted to his profession—suddenly died of total exhaustion.

The sole attempt to resume his labors, interrupted when he had been so completely divested of his natural life, came to a sudden end when he was drafted into a *Landswehr* regiment; imposing on him the duress of a repulsive and now all the more wasted stay in the capital of the country with authority over him. Released after many months from these idle duties, he returned to the domicile of his waiting, but lacked that inner clarity and freedom by which alone his indescribable work could blossom. He was furthermore reluctant to adulterate it in any way with the malevolent calamity of those painful years: at least that is how he excused his inactivity in several letters where he admitted that he felt like a child who did not want to touch its favorite things so long as it was tortured by toothaches.

Finally, by the time the war had shifted over into the diffuse disorder of revolutionary seizures, an inanity he had managed somehow to keep at bay by translating Mallarmé, he succeeded, thanks to an invitation to lecture, to escape the by now totally despised city and his apartment there—so plagued by visits from strangers and vague acquaintances that it had nearly become a public place—following the welcome call to another country which, furthermore, had remained neutral and helpful throughout the confusion of the past few years. It was, however, the very landscape through which, returning by train from southern regions, he had

travelled earlier, often behind intentionally drawn curtains: so much did something in his nature contradict the pathetic, though simultaneously sober, mountainousness that had made it famous for previous generations. It was this country which now offered itself to him through that obliging invitation in addition to offering hospitality at one of its lakes.

However, this new sojourn beyond the previously intolerable borders also turned into a waiting period, even if a somewhat milder one. To be sure, he had been granted a measure of relief; but here too he lacked the decisive conditions necessary for that inner thoughtfulness which had to precede the constellating of his work. He kept changing residencies. Forming many new relationships was unavoidable, and even proved vaguely gratifying. The attraction that his earnest, though not fully achieved solitude occasionally exercised on various people against his will (due perhaps to a longing that constantly denied it), also led here to curious relationships in which he had to become the giving and communicating one to such an extent that the gathering of those inner resources, which eventually charges the core of one's being, was thwarted month after month.

Then, after more than a year and a half, at the start of a new winter, when it seemed that he would have to return to that derailed country which still appeared like a sickroom, over-crowded with war and the effluvia of its somber disasters—something totally unexpected occurred: he was offered a very remote old manor house, where a friendly and quiet housekeeper awaited him, and hardly had he moved in (on November 12th) when his surroundings proved themselves more pleasant and useful than he had dared expect.

The roomy, low, white-paneled study with its large old tile stove and the open fireplace besides, seemed to have been waiting only for *him.* Without having to utter as much as a word, he was cared for from one day to the next. Just beyond the windows lay the quiet park—hornbeams, slowly shedding their leaves, bordered a broad meadow to the right and left, as well as an unframed pond, whose constantly falling fountain translated, as it were, that stillness so fulfilling for the eyes into sound. The more the park, with its several beautiful plane trees and the avenue lined with widely-spaced chestnut trees that bordered it on its open side, surrendered itself to Fall, the deeper grew the influence of the view. Without unduly narrowing the eye's need, its softly climbing meadows prepared one for the slopes of a wooded hill: and no matter how much he loved the plains, in this moment dedicated to thoughtfulness, this limitation seemed proper to him in that it corresponded, as a landscape, to the consciousness of an *intérieur* he hoped to intensify in himself day after day.

As far as he could remember back, he had never felt more naturally and securely sheltered; not even in that older princely castle which had played such an important role in his life and which he safeguarded deep inside him with something akin to passion, since the blind clawings of the war had razed its gigantic, seemingly imperishable walls down to their rock foundations. That castle above the sea had been spacious; the power of those times and figures, still echoing through him, presented countless challenges for a soul that had to become familiar with much that surpassed it, before being allowed to remain itself.

Here, in this small, surveyable noble estate, a less overwhelming past needed to be overcome. Rooms and corridors, unused for a long time now relative to their original intent, had a simple purpose for someone who considered them practically. There were few portraits strong enough to impose their personalities: the living one carried the day, and the objects, of a modest sort, did not demand to be entertained with more than the spontaneous overflow of his instantly grateful spirits.

So, unexpectedly saved by this refuge, could he now begin to reengage his shattered being? One would think so. How favorable the situation was for him can only be grasped on learning that just before he was to isolate himself in these new surroundings, a double, and just as unexpected, act of providence had allowed him to revisit two famous places in different countries, belonging inseparably to the history of his past. One of them was that unique city to which he owed not only his complete spiritual education, but to whose influence he also rightfully ascribed the fact that the particular sufferings and beatitudes of his being had revealed themselves to him more clearly and on a larger scale than is usual even for those of his age gifted with a strong inner make-up.

And on top of it all: inexhaustible mercy had filled him to overflowing (what perfect timing, one wants to shout) with the prodigious turbulence that overwhelms a heart which, under the onrush of again being loved, decides to love in return. . .

Yes, this too.

Now, when the door closes behind someone so perfectly favored and gifted, one feels that one may confidently abandon him to such a magnificently furnished solitude.

And yet the fragmentary notes and drafts of letters, which record the close of that remarkable winter, describe a failure, a horrible and distressing loss.

The writer (after the fact, obviously) has gathered these loose pages under the title "Testament," probably because these insights into his peculiar fate express a will bound to remain his *last*, even if the task of many years still awaits his heart.

THE TESTAMENT

"Mais j'accuse surtout celui qui se comporte contre sa volonté"
—Jean Moréas (in April)

Spring—which this year has prevailed so early that the shining dandelions have already bloomed into puffballs and cardamine stands in the meadows—has never been propitious to my mind; its powers do not pull towards that inwardness which has to be attempted now, however, after these many lost months, in the final days in this nurturing shelter.

Just when the relations to the beloved were peaceful enough for me to foresee a stretch of time during which I would be able to belong to myself with undivided attention, a small building, which I took for a barn and to which I paid no further attention, began to take shape near the park's exit. It turned out to be an electric saw mill which has been whining and buzzing unremittingly for ten days now. My peace is destroyed. I realize that what I had planned was not to be tackled as a last minute make-up exercise, like a school assignment put off with guilty conscience. The time for work is over. Now the saw speaks.

How accurate the judgment is. Strange: I realize how everything here belonged to me through hearing—from where it has now been removed. At night, when I wake up, or late in the evening (for they work long hours over there in the saw mill, at times starting their noisy workday shortly after five in the morning), that wide and pure space of hearing I had been allowed to inhabit for so long, reasserts itself with indescribable gentleness. Just now it started up again, "called up" so to speak by the little bird voices; its center, however, has always remained the fountain, and now I lie here in the night taking leave of it. This was it, this was what should have shaped me throughout these many, many weeks of steady listening. How I understood it immediately, how I took it in, from the very first day: the multiform metamorphosis of its tumbling waters. The slightest breath of air changed it, and when all became perfectly still around it, the suddenly isolated jet fell back upon itself, resonated in and of itself, completely different from when it played over the water's surface. Speak, I said to the fountain, and listened. Speak, I said, and my whole being harkened to it. Speak, you pure meeting of Lightness and Heaviness, you light-headedness of weight, you toy-tree, you parable under the laden sorrow-trees worrying under their bark.

And with a spontaneous and innocent cunning of my heart—so that there would be nothing but this, from which I wanted to learn how to be—I equated the fountain with the Beloved, the faraway, the restrained, the silent.

Ah, we were agreed that silence should reign between us: it was to be this winter's law, a hard and powerful law—but in return our mildness would set in, not only ours, the mildness of the accomplished work would be in my heart. Perhaps—the need was so huge—we would have been strong enough to remain silent—it was not we who broke it, it was the mouth of fate which opened and spews us with news. For love is the true climate of fate; no matter how widely it draws its orbit through the heavens, its milky way with billions of the blood's stars, the land beneath these heavens is pregnant with calamities. Not even the gods, in the metamorphoses of their passions, were powerful enough to free the earthly beloved, scared and fleeing, from the entanglements of this fertile soil.

Is what I am writing here madness? Why don't the lovers' letters ever address this dilemma? Ah, their worries are different. It always looks as if the lover swung her beloved higher than he was ever able to throw himself. Her desire for him makes him more beautiful and capable. The anticipation of her open arms gives wings to his race. His performance clarifies itself in the lineaments of happiness, where otherwise it would have run over into murky yearnings. Only now, at her breast, did work become exuberant and sweet for the laboring man—and rest, infinite. Only now did fear, the precipitate of his boyhood nights, dissolve, only now did he see through to the ground of night.

And if there is a disturbance in his joy, it arises from obstacles, hindrances or threats to this union; all misery is gathered in this one worry: to lose each other; and nowhere is there doubt, except in jealousy.

But how about him who already knew it? He, in whose heart Loneliness had outstripped the loved one? From early on he knew Her pure face. As he took flight from family resemblances surrounding him and trying, over and over, to claim him, Her face became his future: through Her eyes he gazed upon the Open. His small hand came quietly to rest in Hers, which led and never took possession. As he grew up, he gradually became aware of Her tall figure—back then She would at times step up and test him like a spear.

And later She threw him.

Ah, with what could the lover surprise ***him***, for whom this election had become conscious and more than memory: the pleasure of the arm drawn back, the thrust—and, oh, the trembling in the target.

And yet who had praised the lover more, who had yearned more for the loved one, than this man, used by the gods, whose fate had already been decided!

It was as if, from that trajectory, which he followed with the strength of loneliness, he had recognized her form more perfectly than anyone before him. And from that knowledge, which was infinite, an infinite privation grew for him.

He fled before her, by calling her. He somehow felt compelled to remain exposed to her, to bear with her, to weather her. For was there not a lack in his urge, that had to be lived up to, as long as he feared and avoided this demanding woman? Didn't this last minute avoidance of his feelings for her falsify his feeling about everything? Was this fear of being loved, which came from the earliest sufferings of his childhood and had never left him, a warning he had to heed to the end, or was what mattered that he be healed from it, as from his oldest error?

Did that lover exist who was not an obstacle, who did not slow him down and deflect him into the tarryings of love? She who understood that he was thrown way beyond her, when he pierced her? The blissful one who acquiesced to his great thrownness, who did not think of stealing him and of keeping him surreptitiously, and who did not race ahead to block his trajectory again and again? One perhaps already abandoned, who would take the risk, no matter how often he could still be hurled through her and into the target, by the hand of his Goddess?

Oh, if she existed, then there was help for him, as there had been a different help for him, when as an adolescent, he came to Russia. The afflictions of his childhood had brought it about that until the end of his second decade he lived in the assumption that he was confronting, singly and alone, a hostile world, that he was rebelling, day after day, against the overbearing power of everybody. The outcome of this mistaken attitude, no matter the honesty of the emotions, could only be something distorted, unhealthy. Russia gently released him from the evil spell of this prejudice—not by slowly convincing him, but overnight: literally, during his first night in Moscow. Without boasting about it, effortlessly, as if through a pure season of the heart this conciliatory country offered him unending proof to the contrary. How he believed it, how that country charmed him into being brotherly. And even though he has always remained a beginner in professing this harmony (perhaps because he could not remain on Russian soil), he can never forget it, he knows and practices it.

*

Emotional experiences, strange emotional experiences, however, which coalesced much later in that specific occurrence which I grasped—very vaguely—under the image of the *revenant*, challenge my right to be completely absorbed in the loved one (no matter how infinite the space she may grant). No matter how much I have to admit the law of this accomplishment, in her center I appear to myself as simultaneously unfree and independent. My deeper conscience leaves me no peace, and the fear that distracts me is not that creaturely fear of sweet annihilation which arises from the center of love; it is the terror of a disloyalty which rattles me again and again, claiming, as it were, that I have no right to follow my inclination:

as if the capital of my emotions had been apportioned and I were poor; as if, loved and loving, I took back the shares, distributed a long time ago, from unknown inheritors already living off them. Somewhere in the expanses of my emotional space there arises a disquiet, a reluctance; complaints I do not understand drift towards me, threats rise up in my being: I am no longer at one with myself.

But this at-oneness, unexplainable as it is, is the court I have stood before since my childhood. Yes, facing the eye-slits of their hoods, I live in that space where my hidden judges pass sentence. I have never left it.

My life is a special kind of love, which is already accomplished. Just as Saint George's love is in killing dragons, a lasting action that fills up time until its end, so the expenditures of my heart have already been put to use and transformed into a final advent. At times I am lifted into its center: an image of completion.

(The place of the princess, however, is off to the side. She prays for it to succeed. She kneels.)

Artist, do not believe that your test lies in the work. You are not what you pretend to be, and what this or that one, not knowing any better, may take you for, until the work has become your very nature to such an extent that you cannot do otherwise than prove yourself in it. Working thus, you are the masterly thrown spear: laws from Her throwing hand receive you, and together you hit the target—: what could be more certain than your flight?

Your test, however, is that you are not always thrown. That the spear-player Loneliness does not choose you for a long time, that She forgets you. This is the time of temptation, when you feel unused, incapable. (As if being ready was not work enough!) Then, when you do not lie there very heavily, diversions exercise you and try to see to what other uses you can be put. As a blind man's staff, as one of the rods in a grating, or as the balancing pole of a tight-rope walker. Or else they are capable of planting you in the soil of fate, for the miracle of the seasons to happen to you and for you perhaps to sprout small green leaves of happiness. . .

O then, bronze one: lie heavy.

Be spear. Be spear. Be spear!

This game of acceptance and refusal, in which there is much to lose and much to win, constitutes the "pastime" of life for most people and maintains their urges.

The artist belongs to those who have renounced profit and loss with a single, irrevocable agreement: for neither of them exists any longer in the law, in the space of pure obedience.

This final, free affirmation of the world shifts the heart onto another level of experience. Its elective choices are no longer between happiness and unhappiness, its poles are not designated as life and death. Its measure is not the distance between opposites.

Who still thinks that art represents that beautiful that has an opposite; (this lower case "beautiful" belongs to the concept of taste). It is the passion for the whole. Its result: equanimity and equilibrium of the totality.

[If I did not resist the lover, it was because of all the takeovers of one person by another, hers alone, unstoppable, seemed to me to be right. Exposed as I am, I did not want to *avoid* it either; but I yearned to pierce her! That she be a window for me into the expanded cosmos of Being. . . (not mirror.)]

The sudden (what shall I call it?) taking sides in love awoke in me audacious and unequalled memories: as if I had somehow felt that infinitely impartial once before. . .

Asceticism is obviously no solution; it is sensuality with a negative sign. A saint may make use of it as a provisional construction; at the point of intersection of his self-denials he perceives the god of contradiction, the god of the invisible, who has not yet created.

He however, who is committed to the senses, he who, on earth, has to believe in the purity of appearance and the truth of form, how could he start with denial! And even if it proved to be helpful and useful to begin with, for him it would remain a fraud, a ruse, a misappropriation—and in the end it would take its revenge somewhere in the lineaments of his work, as hardness, as aridity, as miserliness, as cowardice of the fruit.

Letters: how torn I was this winter; each letter a push, an assault able to topple everything, or else an intimate penetration that transformed the blood —

and this, daily, during the time supposed to become that of my purest equanimity.

And after I had tuned my existence, for nearly twenty years, in the increasing clarity of my will, so that there could no longer be—there *must* no longer be—news that could touch its essential determination and change it.

A strange terror has remained in my heart that makes it unrecognizable for me.

(from a draft of a letter)
All these refusals, do not forget it, my love, have to do with your power. If I were free, if my heart were not bound like a star into the relations of the irrefutable spirit, then every word, from which rebellion is formed here, denial, complaint—would be Your fame, crossing over to You, agreement, the rush toward you—fall and resurrection in You.

If I were a man of graspable compass, a merchant, a teacher of comprehensible things, an artisan. . .

It is against the secret of my life.

In that the beloved draws all events towards herself, I become untrue to myself; for now it seems to her as if, in the incessant flow, *that* which I have no right to dispose of, also drifts towards her. Partly her will is to blame, partly this seizure is due to her very existence. She had transformed the landscape in the lover's mind and inhabits one of its deepest places—the valley, which drains everything.

The saw has been at it since early morning. My gaze, surviving as it were, keeps melancholically taking in these still apparently holy surroundings, the demolition of which ceaselessly occurs in one's own hearing. Thus it has on occasion been said of the dying that they are not deprived of the world through all the senses simultaneously. Their taste may be gone, their touch may have dulled, their ears may have failed. But they still look. They even still succeed in slowly turning their heads on the pillow, now and then, when a little strength has been gathered, so as to lay the gaze's frame over another part of the picture. It certainly is a relief to take one's final leave by means only of a *single* sense.

Without the intervention of the saw mill over there, I would have hung onto everything here unto the end, though without wringing from it that yield for which it was too late. I would certainly not have made the decision to enter upon such a gradual understanding, as I am now accomplishing day after day, and through the shock of leaving I would have finally encountered the desperation of the unaccomplished and, like a single boulder, it would have crashed down terrifyingly. I do not know what this would have done to me, but I am afraid that in me the form of the beloved would have been buried as if under a landslide.

Does the progress I make in all this (that *that* is what I am looking for, while being condemned to make myself aware of such difficult matters, should be treated with forbearance) does the progress I make reside in succeeding, in painful labor, to chisel away at that piece of rock above the head of the loved one, that in its fall would have destroyed her pure presence? (Where does its stone-dust blow? Who breathes it in? Ah, guilt has not gone from the world.) But *she*, the beloved, shall be guiltless for

me. And this too may perhaps be taken as progress (as if it were only with "pro-gressions" *[mit "Fort-Schritten"]* that I can distance myself from the scene of the loss!), this also, that I no longer call this conflict an abyss gaping between love and work—it gapes in my love itself, since, as I have now discovered once and for all, my work is love. What a simplification! And now this is, in fact, as far as I can see, the only conflict in my life. All else are tasks.

In military school I realized it for the first time; later in an infantry uniform. And now again: how every creature is, in a way, faced with just *that* heaviness which corresponds to the plane of its powers, even if it often exceeds them by far.

We, however, who stand at the incomprehensible point of intersection of so many different and contradictory worlds, find ourselves in the situation of suddenly being assaulted by a heaviness that has no connection with our abilities and training: an *alien* heaviness.

(When would the swan be expected to pass the lion's test? How could a piece of fish-fate end up in the bat's realm—or a horse's terror in that of a digesting snake?)

I believe therefore that, already as a child, I never prayed for anything but *my* heaviness, in order for that to befall me which is my own and not, by mistake, the joiner's or the hack driver's or the soldier's, because I want to recognize myself in my heaviest.

Only as a consequence of the confusion in the Human, unlimited and curious in all directions, which let *everything* happen to everyone, could the fall come into disrepute. How familiar the latter is, when you meet it in your own passionately empowered sphere!

Nothing should be preserved of that heavy "alien" affliction which one morning at four (it was still night and a cold rain fell in the darkness) drove me away and to G., just as I had entered here upon the work of my thoughtfulness. No one will ever know more about it than what I, gently calling myself to account, confide to these pages. But before I burn the small notebook, bound in blue leather, which I took with me on the trip back then, I want to report on its condition. Barely three of its pages are written upon; but that which tightly fills up these pages—apart from two addresses—makes the many empty pages so uncanny that I will also throw them into the fire, as if they were infested and plagued. Without changing anything in the least, I now transcribe, before destroying them, the meaningless words, into which my then capable mind decomposed itself because an "alien" heaviness had suddenly been poured over it, like caustic acid.

(From the destroyed notebook:)

(At the top margin the word:) nightmare—(then numbers, without order, small meaningless additions, then:)

silver joy rawness round lot dearer
infusion sand why never attention
ambush down envy glutton blessing addiction
gnawer path twig immersed fence legend credulity
wasp heart cinema (child) mourning dewfall
rumor ring gentleness evening cradle
living food bird wheat-ear lot no
baptismal-font anger murkiness colored applause
being pack-animal corrosion away fall-out
hairdo fences typhoon ah cradle may
January silver fog paths call letter
messenger *Busta*[1] memo car Timgad shore
feed-rack drink novice wink oh axis
shine finch tax storm stone *Ribe*
midsummer eve bonfire service august pose poseur
nun eddy spear rinsing lively
seam notch being exact burden hollow (?)
grip slaver claw exercise night-train eagerness
desert spear frenzy break-in rage run
Lebzelt trembling-grass afternoon everywhere hundred healing yeast *Wieburg* spendrift
king thorn step ungood unworth gutter
keystone trill breach-of-faith shame east *Febr*
casein comer wreath bishopric berry
bier bear dwarf chirp stamp bad

(New page:)

return darling diver bird's head
cold sweat necklace thorn-frost vicuña
ring-band freightcar Liebknecht Agnese
Terwin yarn guest role glasses will school
do-good Marie *Iffland* heartblood whimper
Zweibruck quitting-time *Wendlandt* descent
trace tracing decline *Vierzug* zander onlooker *Larde Ferilitzsch* drip determination
only bast roar ballast nightheart willfullness clean ur-guest *Billung* ready
seam-duress *Niefeln Hieber* taking-to-heart

[1]TN: Words in italics are either place names or untranslatable Rilkean neologisms.

Ichthüs nomenclature *Beinung* judge
Regulus gallows military-power teasel spool
plays slowly but no music reaches
the round dance Naumann (and three addresses.)

(draft of a letter)
As long as things stand this way with us, I don't know how to live—because I am as incapable of living if I know you to be unhappy through my fault, as I am when I make you happy in the way you now expect of me. If only at every moment I had been completely inconsiderate, in the freedom of my love! There is no worse prison than the fear to hurt a loved one. It falsifies everything. It falsifies every urge of the heart; without it, things would not have come to where I had to beg our happiness for every occasion for aloneness, as a special exception. *My aloneness,* this most peculiar characteristic of my existence: now it appears like a flight from our love—and how could it not always be burdened, from the start, by your wish that it shouldn't last long? And then: how do you want, on another occasion, to muster the strength to keep from my seclusion those repercussions that echo from and beyond the enclaves of our happiness?

Should I call myself unhappy forever (alas, and what is worse: creating unhappiness in the happiest of hearts!) because I cannot take love so lightly as to extract from it a mere enhancement of my capabilities? I never thought much of those who needed to be in love so as to motivate their spirit; how could I count on this impetus, given that the work itself is infinitely more love than a single human can set in motion in any one? It is *all* of love.

And so to me this rapture toward the beloved appears to be a particular instance of love, which spares or alleviates nothing—to the contrary, its very unresolvedness requires the most perfect effort so that all its demands may be endured, recognized and fulfilled.

Tell me, tell me—do I voice an exception, perhaps a confusion of my nature, in this which I seem so strangely commanded to suffer? Rarely has something like this been deplored, either because the attention of most people does not reach beyond pleasure and jealousy, or because that which had to be suffered in singular cases like mine, had always been judged to be nameless, ineffable.

Rare are those whose heart-throw does not have its end in the embrace; if they followed it further—they would perhaps see how, beyond, its curve takes on the odd acceleration of an impatience wishing that even this happiness were already done with. And further along it disappears into the limitless, and means—do you know what?—it means the path and the yearning of those who do not stop, who go on and on—of Russian pilgrims and Bedouin nomads who are driven on and on with their staff of olive wood. . .

Only he may dwell in embraces who can also die in them; everyone elects his dwelling according to (if I may express this frivolously, sensuously) his taste in death. What pushes those men toward their aimless wanderings through the steppes, through the desert, is the feeling that their death would not feel at ease in their homes, would not have its place there.

A Swedish friend, who spent a winter all alone at the edge of the desert, wrote to me:

". . . landscapes of such vastness that one could have enough space in them even after death. At least for some time —."

[Despite all, my God, how rich, how peaceful, how complete I would be now, had this love been given me unconditionally, unburdened by the hopes, expectations and demands of a heart which, for fear of loss, seems incapable of seizing its share of happiness.

Just as it caused me, who suspected nothing, neither fear nor worry, back then, when it lay ahead—so should it be here now, perhaps behind us (and therefore no less present, for what in it could be transitory!), perhaps always again lying ahead. . .]

The principle of my work is a passionate subordination to the object that occupies me, to which, in other words, my love belongs.

The reversal of this subordination finally occurs—surprising even me—in the creative act suddenly welling up in me, in which I conquer as guiltlessly as I was pure and innocent in my subordination during the previous phase.

For a heart that performs under such circumstances, being loved is perhaps always bound to be disastrous. It also subordinates itself, as is its wont, to the lover, whom it does not have to form, but whom it tempts, because of its infinite acquiescence, to increasing usurpations. And the reversal, which in this case would simply be the love for—one is tempted to say, against—the lover can never work itself out completely against the latter taking the upper hand. . .

Thus the experience of love appears, as it were, as a stunted, impotent side effect of the creative experience, as a diminution—and remains unaccomplished, unmastered, and, measured against the higher order of that other achievement, unallowable.

Ah, I now live as if I had just arrived to spend a few weeks at this place, famous for its electric saw mill,

. . .without any particular expectations for this sojourn, the least of which would be too exhausting for me. . .

The Aloneness in which I have anchored myself for the last twenty years

must not become an exception, a "vacation" which, adducing many justifications, I would have to beg from a supervising happiness. I must live in it without any boundaries. It has to remain this ground of consciousness, to which I can always return, without intending a quick gain here and now, without expecting that it should prove fertile for me; but involuntarily, unstressed, innocent: as to the place I belong to.

What powers have arranged to meet in my heart? . . .
They retreat when they find it inhabited.

One who, alas, when it comes to the true decisions of his heart, has to count for nought being loved and loving.

[How tired I am of making all these countermoves against love's seizures —; where is the heart that will not "order up" a specific, willful happiness from me, but that would leave it up to me to give it the happiness that flows inexhaustibly from me?]

Striving and counter-striving: how tired I am of it all. Where is the heart that will not "order up" a willful happiness from me, but that would leave it up to me to give it the happiness that flows inexhaustibly from me?

But there is no agreement on that. Ah, for the struggles to be over! That it may be as in Girard de Roussillon's final *laisse*:

"Les guerres sont finies et les
oeuvres commencent."

Or Rimbaud:

Once to shake up language with an impetuous heart, to make it divinely "useless" for one moment—and then to leave, without looking back, become a merchant.

I knew it all winter: I have to think myself towards something. Alas—this is the worst loss: to have lost something unknown, something unguessable.

These days are among the most difficult. . . The displeasure of the unaccomplished now also attacks my body like rust; even sleep refuses its balm—: into half-wakefulness my pulse beats against my temples like heavy steps that cannot find peace.

If I were allowed to call you. . . but exactly that would destroy my last —:this court in front of which I recognize myself. You yourself wrote as much recently: that I don't belong to those who can be consoled by love. That's the way it is. For what, finally, could be more useless for me than a consoled life?

O, all that did not surprise me, the way it overwhelms the fools in their rapture. While my judges, with terrifying slowness, by the light of my happiness, read me the sentence, I stood by their side, already surveying the extent of their verdict.

But one evening I could bear it no longer. The protective, ever-giving quiet of the house and my horrible exposure at its center, threw such discord into my heart that I thought I could not go on living. Unable to read, and not even capable of gazing into the usually so consoling fire of the pine logs, I fetched some random folders from the shelves of the bookcase, which I had never opened before, and forced myself to turn page after page. They were reproductions of paintings from the collections of the great galleries, they excited me by their approximate and unharmonic colors, I don't know how many of these paintings I stared at, innumerable ones, turning the pages faster and faster: suddenly I became aware that all this time I had been thinking: Where to? Where to?

Where to, toward freedom? Where to, toward the equanimity of true existence? Where to, toward innocence, towards the no longer dispensable?

I came to, became more attentive, even alert. As if an internally anchored reflection had suddenly spilled outward, I became absorbed in the page that happened to be open in front of me. It was Jan Van Eyck's so-called "Madonna of Lucca," the lovely one, in her red coat, who offers her delicate breast to the sitting and seriously suckling infant.

Where to? Where to?

And suddenly I wished, wished, o wished with all the ardor my heart had ever been capable of, wished to be, not one of the two small apples—in the painting —, not one of these painted apples on the painted window sill—even that seemed too much of a fate. . . No: to become the soft, the small, the unseeming shadow of one of these apples—that was the wish into which the whole of my being gathered itself.

And as if a fulfillment were possible or as if this wish alone had given a wonderfully certain insight, tears of gratitude came to my eyes.

Occasionally, in the incessantly probing misery of these days, I am surprised by something like the prescient shimmer of a new spiritual joy: as if everything had indeed become simpler, and an ineffable fate made itself more graspable in its approximations. For is this not it, finally (if you have to voice it): that inside me light and darkness must not be determined by the overriding influence of one person, but only by something nameless. This is, so to speak, the minimum of my piety: if I gave it up I would have to return behind the first Cross Road of my life—behind its earliest, quietest, freest decision. Behind my self.

(Draft of a letter) Castle B. . ., no date:

always.

To whom, beloved, to whom, if not to you shall I confide this difficult conclusion of my heart? If it makes you miserable, just think how great must be the misery out of which I write the following.

I have done wrong; betrayal. After six years of destruction and obstruction I have not made use of the circumstances that were offered me with B. . . for the undeferrable inner task; fate has wrung it from my hands. I have to admit that to myself.

You know, dear, how much those circumstances, from the most fortuitous to the most essential, appealed to me, how decisively I seized upon them. You wanted to do your part to safeguard them for me: we did not succeed.

On December 2nd, right after the joyful attempt to draft that Préface in French, I succeeded in writing down the first lines of that work in which my new inner integration was to express itself. On the 4th I was interrupted through the disagreeable task of my birthday correspondence, on the 6th the first disquieting news reached me from G.

You know what happened then; you know everything, there is nothing for me to tell.

You see, I am stuck with my small miscarriage of December 2nd, the work, the life, that fulfills me, gave itself away in it.

At times good, even blessed signs, at times distress and despair wormed their way into me—the upsets were endless, and you could not prevent them.

(To know that I should be made happy or upset only by my work, was of little help!)

And later also, now also, in these last weeks also, I was unable to bring myself to the consciousness of my natural solitude, from which alone I am able to gain control over myself. My heart had been jolted from the center of its circles toward the periphery, there where it was closest to you—why, there it may be big, full of feeling, jubilation or anxiety—it is not in its own constellation, it is not the heart of my life.

In our sweetest and perhaps most just hour, beloved, you assured me that you could now grasp all kinds of love for me. Ah, pull yourself together,. . . . . ., for the one, whatever its name, that grants me my life, the one that may even strengthen it. I cannot get away from myself. For, if I gave up all, all that was mine and, as I sometimes long to do, blindly abandoned myself to your arms, lost myself therein—then you would be holding somebody who had given up on himself: not me, not me.

I cannot disguise myself or change myself. Exactly as in my childhood I kneeled before the violent love of my father, so do I kneel now in the world and beg those who love me to spare me. Yes, may they spare me!

So that they not use me up for their happiness, but stand by me to help me unfold that deepest, loneliest happiness in me, without whose Great Proofs they would, in the end, never have loved me.

. . . . . .

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

Towards the end of April 1921, while living at Castle Berg am Ichel (Canton Zürich, Switzerland), Rilke assembled a number of fragments, notes & drafts of letters into a work called "Das Testament" (*Testament*). He gave a clean copy of the manuscript to Anton Kippenberg, his publisher, who later handed it over to the poet's inheritors who decided that it should remain unpublished for the time being. It was only in 1976, nearly 50 years after Rilke's death, that his estate gave permission to make it public. That year *Insel Verlag* brought out a volume containing a facsimile edition of the text, accompanied by a transcription, and annotations by Ernst Zinn (on whose work this postface draws for its information.) It was reprinted in the German edition of the poet's *Collected Writings*, but has sofar remained untranslated.

Rilke introduced the text with a distancing third-person narrative suggesting the voice of a literary executor trying to explain the context of the tortured & fragmented document to a future reader. The abstractness of the writing & the omission of actual place- & personal names make it necessary to fill in some of the gaps. When Rilke composed these texts, he had nearly given up the hope of finishing his poetic work—the first two elegies lay nine years behind him (they were completed in 1912) & in the intervening time, lack of that solitude so essential for his writing, combined with the upheavals of the war years, had kept him from producing more than a few fragments, except for the Fourth Elegy, written in one sitting in the fall of 1915.

Rilke, who had been based in Paris since 1902, was visiting his publisher in Munich when the First World War broke out. This forced him to remain in that city until he was called up by the Austrian army in November 1915. (He was to lose his nationality after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire & later became a Czech citizen). Influential friends arranged for the poet to get a desk job, & he worked for six weeks (not the many months he suggests in *Testament*) in the War Archive in Vienna before being discharged in June 1916 & returning to Munich, "the domicile of his waiting." After the war, & in the aftermath of the aborted communist revolution in Germany, he accepted an earlier invitation by the "Hottingen Reading Circle" in Zürich which, combined with Countess Mary Dobrzensky's offer to stay at her house on Lake Geneva, enabled him to leave Germany for Switzerland. During the summer of 1920, Rilke made two trips to his favorite cities: Paris & Venice. Then, in October 1920, Swiss friends, Richard & Lily Ziegler, put their small Castle Berg am Ichel at his disposal. He moved in on November 12 & stayed there until May 10, 1921.

The nameless "beloved" of *Testament* is Baladine Klossowska, with whom he had become friends in his Paris days & who was now living in Geneva with her two sons, Pierre and Balthusz. The French *Préface* he mentions was an introduction he wrote for a book of some 40 ink drawings by the then 11-year old Balthusz Klossowski (who would later simplify his name & sign his paintings "Baltus"). Rilke

& Klossowska —"Merline" as he came to call her—fell in love, & an affair developed that had many of the same features as Rilke's previous affairs: the need to be loved & close to the loved was constantly countermanded by Rilke's sense of his higher calling which demanded total isolation & absolute devotion to his "spear-throwing" "goddess Loneliness" for his creativity to unfold & his work to continue. (See also Rilke's *Letters to Merline*, [translated by Jesse Browner, Paragon House, 1989] which presents the "exoteric" side of the affair of which *Testament* is the inner or "esoteric" working.)

After he left Castle Berg, Rilke cast around for a new abode &, with the help of Klossowska, found the castle of Muzot in the Valais. "Merline," writes Jesse Browner, "worked tirelessly to make the primitive manor livable, but she knew that she was not to share it if her lover was to achieve his ultimate aim. She hired and trained a new housekeeper, then left for Berlin in November 1921." In February 1922, Rilke did indeed finish his *Elegies* & compose the *Sonnets to Orpheus* in one incredible spurt of creative energy. Although he & Merline had drifted further apart in the following years, Rilke's last letter—written on December 23rd, six days before his death—was for Baladine Klossowska.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
RHAPSODY ON A THEME BY VALLEJO

When we are born our lives are twilight contoured.
We come in at 1 PM. Bright post-noon,
the sun already falling.
We are the mountain behind which it sets.
We are the tramontation.
We do not slip the caul. We are net
capped—calotte—to be in hell is to be concealed,
our helmet is occult, apocalypse is
to be uncovered, it will take
apocalypse to slip the network. But what
will be uncovered?
Will the revelation be, in flesh and syntax,
the bulk of our existence is invisible?
That, in psyche, we have twigs, branches, growing
out the back of our skulls,
that all are in what appears to be massive
ground-trailing war bonnets,
rooted bonnets, so that the earth spins under
our feet as we appear to tread forward?
Forestral back-
ground, the babe's eyes peering,
piercing his own foliage, or not his *own*,
his encaulment, his earlier hours
that give a drift to "forever,"
thus eternity
is what we peer from, as if in meager bas-relief,
encased, encanyoned, each, eyes pressing forward
as if to pop
the *peresprit* & *mereaffair*,
for parents are only partially visible,

glinting, half-concealed, alien words,
    Oh the twist the
writhe of man, to be free, to loose his wimple!
But to be fully visible is another thing, is
to fully show the bonnet banyan roots
and
    the boulders the roots wicker
        as if in empty space!

Yea what are the contents of these boulders?
Williams' "Desert Music" may be the tip of his lifeberg,
may be, may be! but the pyramidal spread,
                the ooze into which it is sunk,
is sinking, is unknowable,—I thrust forward, feel
the banyanwork, resistance is a good,
but can I telepathize these roots, can I
as eggs crack these boulders? And If I could, should I
    want to? Fission is not personal, it
breaks
back, yours
and my background are in hell
embedded, sleeperwise we are a starry chain of hands
& claws & feelers & paws & hoofs,
                & then it downpours a week,
or earth belches, or tidal waves Bangladesh,
and all this anti-fission is so much *cancha*, so much
roasted fortitude, the stuttering of pining pebbles.

It matters not, it matters
in, birth is a geology,
our mothers are in us, our fathers are in our mothers,
how reach around mom to dad? How know
if he is alive in her, as alive as she is in us?
At 18, I watched a woman fucked by a stallion,
    and that for a moment cleared my head
or I should say, filled it with a fatherforce
to the extent my eyes clouded, hydrant-able,
oh wanting to burst! Therefore I am excited over my dilemma,
and can only respect the extent to which my shadow

is that of a duck's,
and know it is not nonsense to mistake one's equipage
for the shadow of blackbirds,

at one week my hands too were curling about
trying to latch onto something floating,
as if as if a breastangel
were angle, or ironwork,
in expulsion I am
never fully expulsed, my basis
in continuity

unfloored

moored

octapotable

LARRY EIGNER
SIX POEMS

Rvrbrance

in a small room
tv's
large (for JF and JM

i
might've

realized

prior to
the reverse

how far
back)

one world
in the head

the window opened

sometimes cloudless

or there's one cloud, say,

in all of the sky

familiar

another country

few or many

escape to one day

while in the open air

and the weather continues bad

(music

to hear

for a change

Hayden

face to the sun

spirit

still ok

were you there when

feet on the ground, head

up at cloud 4 or 5

Gospel so hectic

of how much use
it's

all in Time

half-lives

squander

pass

impossibles

fade (dwindle

though one is enough

there's always dawn and sundown

continuous

forever? east and west

shine

give

peace

If there's no pumpkin under the mattress there's always
say between the toes one or two peas

while it's quiet morning
in the street

Dec 15-20 90

some few cars parked

not idling

Spectra

a great wide band
to life

Jan 11 91

like the leaky straw
IN my coffee

top to bottom

distorted wherever

a rider pedaling
straight
hands clasped
behind back
the road level

Jan 4-13 90

a dirigible
as suddenly
the first in years
with all the other things
the sky's wall steep
hardly wind or cloud

a squirrel through the fence
a green blanket
the back yard

corner

stop-sign

STOP
W A R

organization

of the cars

arrowy traffic

on the bigger road

no clouds cross the sky

space

buildings

windows

you don't know

how much (little)

you want

even at the end

May 19 86

STAN FRIEDMAN
FOUR POEMS

ASSUME THAT MEMORY IS A GLASS SHEET

Relax next to an elderly man
as a girl shatters the calm
of the pool's surface. He seems grateful
simply to follow her matted hair,
the ripples surrounding her
like a parenthesized hush. She will emerge
coated in glass. Sculpt the old man's fist
in the shape of a Hummel swan.

Enter the Times Square sex shop
named Wonderland, bringing a pocket
of singles into the booth. A steel partition
rises, reverse guillotine, to reveal
not stained Plexiglass, but a space
to stick hands through. For two dollars
touch the breasts of the nearest torso,
oiled, familiar. She will whisper how
all these reaching fingers remind her
of wheat before the rain. She will speak
a name just as the hole slaps shut.

Yell at the bank teller.
She has miscounted and turned off
the speaker. On the business side
of the glass her only perception
is a mouth moving without voice,
a backward confessional. Yell

that she didn't know how to love,
that leaving, like waiting in line,
is a desperate act. She will reveal
her empty palms only when you
focus on the window itself.
She will be replaced by the reflection
of a man, red-faced, forgetful
of where he is at.

LAND OF THE GIANTS

("In this shrunken era, bereft of Kafkas, Picassos, and Edisons, anchormen become the giants of society."

—Lewis Grossberger)

Good evening. Consider my dimple.
June 5th, UAL Flight 6040
smashed head-on into my cheek
killing all aboard save one
3 month old girl who came to rest
safely on my tongue.

Good evening. Regard my ear.
Follow the wire that winds
like a bean stalk down my sleeve,
out my back, past that guy
working the camera. It is plugged
into the brain of, perhaps,
a balding, overweight Hispanic,

a big-nosed, yellow-toothed woman,
in other words, the voice of God.

This just in:
A tree has fallen over in the woods
killing an unheeding, one-handed man
who, ostensibly, was sitting beneath it,
clapping. Experts disagree
as to whether any sound at all
resulted from the event. . .
Well, the point is moot. *I* am the sound,
the echo of incident, the talk of the town.

Though I stand taller than any map,
this land has one dimension.
Fudge with the contrast if you must
but don't bring me in any clearer,
my static body pressed against the glass
is a radioactive reflection of yours.
Good evening. Interpret my smile.

UNWANTED LIGHT

Dead on the cooling tar
an 18 year old girl has been
struck by a car that did not stop.
Witnesses say a male Caucasian
lost control as a passenger
buried her head in his lap
the moment before impact.

Blood trickles from the girl's ear,
the first she has shed on a man's
account. We had wanted her
but she fought off our buttery
hands at the drive in, the beer breath
kisses when we drove to the river and stalled.

Soon, we will line our hardtops
end to end and follow
the hearse uptown. We will
shake off the frustration of not
having forced her, the stupidity
of our headlights burning
in the middle of our day.

TANGLE

What you hold in common with my father is cancer.
What you share with the windowbox
is the way you flourish on a ledge,
wither in winter and in early spring
as even the cat grows heavy with life, you die.
An uninspired ending. You see, there was hope
that my cypress would flower, the kind of hope
that can cleanse a body of cancer,
or shape the roll of a die.

Vines tangled like arms in the windowbox
then the cat dug in for the spring
and knocked the whole thing from the ledge.

When I woke and saw the empty ledge,
when I pictured the tumbling planter, I had hope
that, like a cat, it would take the fall and spring
the way my father, wiry with cancer,
landed on his feet. But the windowbox
didn't hold his grace, nor did it die
in your fashion: inside out. The way to die,
in your words, is a drastic leap off a ledge,
but your veins, tangled like the roots in a windowbox,
strangled you from within, leaving no hope
of a colorful death. If my father treats his cancer
like a flower, then you gave way to an arid spring.

There is a garden that does not cater to spring—
there is a square of land that seems cut by a die—
where my father's tombstone waits like a cancer:
a marble growth, a malignant ledge.
Yours is dressed in tulips, as if a parent's hope
could turn a grave into a windowbox.

You are the cat's shadow on the shrinking windowbox.
You are luck's first kill of the spring,
a tangle of misfortunes that reveal neither fault nor hope.

A scatter of pollen determined that you should die
while my father holds fast to the crumbling ledge
of his own lifetime. You and he are the endpoints of cancer.

Hope does not course the limbs of cypress. Saplings die,
in a shattered windowbox, free of concern. A rite of spring.

The cat fends a barren ledge, clawing, possessive as cancer.

PAM REHM

A MAN SETS SAIL WITH THE FAIR WIND OF HOPE

Thus we must remind ourselves
of rapture
The line that is here
or bygone
The room, healed
The soup, left

Found a route
alongside my excursion
Trapped against a
destination

Rest in one mood
Seated in traveling clothes
Alone
To wander out
To creep into thoughts

No longer does wine lift his heart. Since he never started he can always stop. Hence, when he says "I do not," it begins with nothing to do.

Who has particular hours lived for eternity?
And which ones love the accidental?

When all secrets come together he is living in ambush. To see things again. A spider is a great amusement for one bored with his native land. Every single change.

Indulged in the hope of an endless journey. Or trip.
Least of all the pilot. His own ship.

Thus we are reminded
of capture
The pirate who is restless
and pacing
The moon, overhead
The fish, troubled

Sound a song
fit for a stranger
Speech interwoven with
Confrontation

Another world but
to our own
Home which declares itself
Home even in the mist

From this moment on he has only one thing against him.
The water, changes. To a certain degree one must consider
everything in his life a wager. Perhaps he is
often fooled. Looses his masculinity. He recoils on
it knowing how to sink down and hide. That is the motive
for his aimless imagination. He is not a child. It
seems to me he seldom moves.

Thus we are stirred by
Foreshadowings
A cat that is black
crossing us
The ladder, angle
An umbrella, opened

Walked to feel
a different breathing
Found a way
to continue

Travel
To define nothing
To whom can one turn
To whom is there a constant
position

Now the various squalls have receded. The quiet activity of forgetting. Tomorrow he is going in such a way that the remnants of memory will prove to him that he is still young. Listening to a joke that cancels the fear of immanent thinking. When sensuousness appears he cannot find it on any map. Even the legend is no longer developed. No special piano or porcelain dishes. Artificial puzzle. Trying to put together what belongs together. The sailor's yarn, the flag, the deck; always a welcome quest. To be partially possessed.

So we are reminded
of the cadence
Sinking away into
stillness
An absolute cessation

It is perhaps that
he has never grown
into the present

but the preordainment
imparted to him

was something—
As he looks back on
his past—
apart from his own
power

It is the one being.
It is the one who could almost be himself.
A man sets sail with the fair wind of hope.
A man sets sail when everything in him tightens.
When the land forces its way through him.
He speaks something. The lips come apart to repeat
"the first time." And then, as if rediscovering
his thought, "it is, indeed, despair."

CHARLES OLSON
FOUR LETTERS TO THE GLOUCESTER DAILY TIMES

FOREWORD
BY GERRIT LANSING

When in 1960 Harry Martin and I arranged a reading for Charles Olson at the house of John Hays Hammond, Jr. (later called "The Hammond Castle Museum"), and the event was announced, on home-made posters we distributed throughout Cape Ann, and in the local newspaper, as a "reading from the *Maximus* and other poems." Charles was not happy with this announcement. He would have preferred it be emphasized that what he was going to read would be *letters*, missives addressed to the citizens of his city, the *polis* of Gloucester, Massachusetts. That the work was so *addressed* was a particular of his attention.

Like the volumes of *Maximus Poems*, this volume of newspaper letters, unique throbs of anger and love, is witness of the scope of Olson's care, the range of his gaze. "Polis is eyes," he wrote, and in the man as in the work that act of attention bristled.

It was eyes I noticed and was noticed by when I first came on the man sitting behind the kitchen table at 28 Fort Square. You climbed the paint-cracked wooden stairs outside the 2nd floor apartment and through the glass of the door you saw the kitchen table, crowded with books, dishes, coffee cups, saucers of spent cigarettes, newspapers and manuscripts. But from behind the kitchen table an enormous pair of eyes seized you, held you. The eyes welcoming while fully attentive. *Encompassing* eyes. Owl-like? Then came an awareness of size, the whole big man.

Later, in the course of frequently walking the streets of Gloucester with Charles, along the bank of the Annisquam River by the high school, paths of Dogtown, I became aware how thorough was the attention he gave to whatever object we stopped to look at. And to the words of our talk: one of Charles' most common expressions was "I hear you" when the quality of your own articulated attention matched his and the sound was true. Always he listened intently to what you offered. And attention to his own thought, rephrasing it and explicating it so as better to be understood.

Like Whitman it seems to me he took with grace whatever was presented to him and rolled it over in his consideration, dream constellations as well as the dreck of the streets. If one thought in terms of sacrament (and as a child Charles had absorbed an awareness of sacrament) it was a kind of sacrament of the "chance" presentation of existence that he met anew every day. Martin Buber, in an essay that I read then when I first knew Charles, expressed what seemed to me a truth about Olson: "The man of sacramental existence is no magician. . .he exerts no power but performs a service, *the* service. . . What is important (in the sacramental sense)? The answer: 'Whatever a man happens to concern himself with.' And the momentary, when it is taken seriously in its momentary, unique contingency, proves to be that which cannot be anticipated or prepared for. The man of sacramental existence is aided by no acquired rules and rhythms, by no traditional methods, no special knowledge or aptitude: he must continually withstand the unforeseen and unforeseeable moment: he must continually, in the outflowing moment, offer release, fulfillment to a thing or creature encountered. And he can effect no selection, no division, since it is not for him to decide what will come his way and what will not. . ."

Unlike W. B. Yeats, Charles did not desire, I think, to be a magician; nor did he claim any power that was not magnified human power; he wished to be *unaware*, and remained unaware, in a kind of negative capability, of the services he performed; and because he did not fear self-indulgence he gave himself without stint, to the painful point of sacrifice.

If one does not choose to use a Judeo-Christian vocabulary of sacrament the heedfulness I saw as a special quality of Olson's being can be otherwise and perhaps more satisfactorily described, in terms of the phenomenology of attention and simple mindfulness in Buddhist, Taoist, and some Hindu Tantric traditions. For students of Olson's work a better understanding of and sympathy with his methodology (archaeology of morning) can be gained from Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* than from the static logical categories of Whitehead's *Process and Reality.* And when I lent Charles a great essay on Orgonomic Functionalism by Wilhelm Reich he returned it only half read, saying it was too close to the heart of his work for him to deal with it at that time.

Reading these public letters written in quick response to contingencies of living in a small New England port city in the '60s makes one eerily aware of the presence of the future in the past. They are prophetic of themes that now more fully impinge upon our consciousness, of history and place, ecological continuities and values. The exactness of social topography that informs them makes them speak strongly to us now. If we can only listen . . . ?

A Note on the Letters
by Peter Anastas

Between December 22, 1962 and May 22, 1969, Charles Olson wrote seventeen letters to the Editor of the *Gloucester Daily Times*. Five of these letters were in the form of poems, two of which were later included in the *Maximus* sequence and two in Olson's *Collected Poems*, edited by George Butterick. None of the prose letters have been reprinted even though they are an essential part of the Olson oeuvre. The subjects they touch upon are fiercely local, ranging from "a beef" about a Winslow Homer commemorative stamp first issued in Gloucester to an expression of the poet's dismay at what he called the "deleterious imitative" inclination of the city's planners and politicians. Yet, like *The Maximus Poems*, these letters have wider dimension and significance, especially those which deal with matters of ecology.

The following three letters are examples of both the subjects Olson treated and his approach, at once personal, historical and hortatory. Olson's letters can also be read as an expression of love for his adopted city and a gloss upon the great poem he made of that adoration, the epic *Maximus*.

In November 1991, Ten Pound Island Book Company of Gloucester published *Maximus to Gloucester: The Letters and Poems of Charles Olson to the Editor of the Gloucester Daily Times, 1962–1969*, which I edited, annotated, and introduced. There is a foreword by Gerrit Lansing.

Poet proposes Gloucester restore selectmen
December 28, 1965* [December 21, 1965]

Editor, Gloucester Times:

What bastard man today does not know, or his fellows who sell to him abuse in and for him, is the created conditions of his own nature. One of these certainly is topography, that is that the shape of things on earth, of his own tools and constructions, the paths he and animals made and the roads which followed on and after those earlier means of his own movement, have, like the air and odors of spring and fall, or the difference of light and color when Winter's air is cold, and like food, and love-making, and children, and a place he lives in, much to do with how alive he himself or her personally is.

I'm used, myself, to the word topography but this sharp December night, driving Cape Ann's still often delicate roads, and I mean ones like Rogers, which imitates Main, and East Main Street, which is almost or perfectly as far as East Gloucester Square the way the road to the Eastern Point followed the initial shore use (it then went up Highland and returned to the shore as Mt. Pleasant Avenue does), and Main Street itself, and Washington (almost essentially still the way it was, to Rockport), and there Eastern Avenue back, I was suddenly, especially passing Mill Pond in the dark and fearing any project which would take away, for a school—we have plenty of naturists who will claim marsh for the ecology of fish and insects, it was ecology as man's own tonight I thought which is, unknowingly, what he and his badgered and mostly stupid leadership, are removing from him, and from his earth and the ways of his life. And I care at least as much for him as I do for fish, and birds, and shellfish, and kelp. And flowers, which also live best, or even the way wheat, and oats and barley and corn, each cereal, as grass and as flowers, hybridized in the mixtures of nature and man's dumps. The hedge-row, they call it east of Buffalo, what is the unturned edge between adjoining plowed fields of two owners, are where, like I'm hoping Mill Pond will be left, because these places between places breed future.

It is not one of the known and thank God therefore I hope not quaint facts, that a Gloucester captain of the China trade, who retired and lived on Washington there on the uplands going down to the marsh of Mill Pond so longed for the feeling of the view he knew he had a small junk made and floated her there in the pond for himself and anyone else who therefore

*First date on letter is date published; date in brackets is date of composition.

had occasion to see. And watch and enjoy—or laugh at and scorn I should also suppose? (It wasn't the least of the arguments for leaving Ten Pound Island just as she was when the City received her back from the Federal Government after the long years she wasn't Gloucester "Commons," that people could just sit and look at her in the evenings on Stacy Boulevard or use her and notice her as the gulls each morning at dawn leave Ten Pound Island, and return in hurry as soon as the sun sets, to get there, and get down before night comes.

I am proposing something. Man today is so stolen and cheated of creation as part actually of his own being—gulls and fish and flowers and mussels and insects, and grasses and water ain't, nearly so much—that, like some of my most precious and ambitious friends think that a Gloucester reference thereon loses the universal, another instance, the new crop of 20-year-olds think that the only universals which possibly can matter are those, like pot, say, which put one directly in touch, and only, with "the universals." I am happy to offer Gloucester, in the guise of the very total I best think was and is man's interference with creation, his ecology (which is like the wife to the husband of his economics) can only come in again, or be drawn like Capt. Whose boat on Mill—or Jim Chum, which Gloucesterman's dory-mate caught in the hooks of a trawl and the man drew the trawl enough to loose his fellow but he was gone for blood and the other had to heave him in a fireman's lift over one shoulder and swim three miles in any sea to their vessel.

I propose Gloucester restore her original selectmen as her Governing Body solely to redeclare the ownership of all her public conditions—including the governance of anything in that Body's and the total Electorate's judgement / no longer any appeal to eminent domain, or larger unit of topography and environment than the precincts of the City's Limit/—in other words to re-establish the principle of *commoners*, for ownership of *commons*. This alone will cut through all the preservations, historical commissions, as well, thank God, all any future except that of hybridized man himself, aware he's diddling when he touches marge of being, including his own. He be commoner, we be, Gloucester be common(s).

CHARLES OLSON

Olson returned in 1957 to a Gloucester run by a city manager, who served at the pleasure of an elected city council, one member representing

each of the city's eight wards. It was called Plan E and had come into use in 1952, replacing a mayor-council form of government that had been instituted in 1873 after the town petitioned the state legislature for a new charter as a city. Prior to the city's first election of a mayor, eight aldermen and twenty-four common councilmen on December 1, 1873, the town had been governed by a board of selectmen who carried out its business as directed by town meeting at which all eligible citizens had an equal voice in decision that affected the common good. The system evolved in colonial days in most Massachusetts towns (it remains to this day in Rockport, Essex and Manchester, towns which border Gloucester) and it is to this system of a government of "commoners" which Olson advocated a return in his letter. By Olson's death in 1970, the city had suffered a succession of managers who had, in the opinion of many, merely mismanaged the city's affairs, especially as regards land use and development. Within the next decade there was an initiative to re-write Gloucester's municipal charter, eliminating Plan E and returning to the mayor-council form of government, under which Gloucester has been governed since 1976.

Olson believed that under Plan E the city had gotten out of the people's control and into the control of managers, who had viewed her not as "commonwealth" but as a purely fiscal entity, at worst as a "business corporation" to be managed, with "profits" to be gained in taxes as the result of an expanded industrial base. It was under Plan E that Olson's despised urban renewal—he called it "renewal by destruction"—took place, chopping up the waterfront into commercial lots and destroying many of the city's most important architectural and historical landmarks, to say nothing of her traditional neighborhoods adjacent to the waterfront. It is against this backdrop that the poet wrote his letter, one of the most penetrating and moving statements of human ecology one can find. It also serves as an introduction to subsequent letters to the editor, focusing on particular instances of destructive or misguided proposals for development or the loss of precious buildings and landmarks.

Rogers which imitates Main. . .East Main Street. . .East Gloucester Square. . .Eastern Point. . .

The poet is describing a drive from Rogers Street, which begins at the Town Landing near his home at 28 Fort Square, running east parallel to Main Street (the old Front Street and present business district of the city) and from there to East Gloucester Square and Eastern Point via Highland Street and Mt. Pleasant Avenue, along the city's oldest roadways, once wagon roads and, before them, pathways.

Washington to Rockport. . .Eastern Avenue back. . .

Again, beginning at the Town Landing in downtown Gloucester, one can travel northward on Washington Street, crossing Route 128 as it enters the city, through Riverdale, Annisquam, Bay View, Lanesville, Folly Cove

and Pigeon Cove to Rockport center along a highway which essentially overlays the earlier colonial paths and, in some instances, aboriginal trails traveled upon by summering Penobscot Indians from Maine and other Algonquian peoples.

It was Olson's habit in the years after his wife's death to drive in the succession of second-hand cars he owned along these roads late at night or early in the morning hours, picturing the land as it had been in the 17th and 18th centuries and occasionally stopping to visit his often sleeping friends.

Mill Pond. . .and fearing any project. . .

At this time, the school committee was contemplating the construction of a new middle school adjacent to the pond, north of the Route 128 traffic circle on Washington Street in Riverdale, just before it curves up past the Riverdale Methodist Church on the left and the old grange hall on the right. Building the school would have entailed the filling of the pond and nearby wetlands. This is the subject of the poet's letter of January 22, 1966.

east of Buffalo. . .

Probably a reference to Wyoming, New York where Olson lived in 1963-1964 while teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

a Gloucester captain. . .

According to George Butterick's A Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson *(Berkeley, 1978), "the captain was James A. Clarkson (c. 1816-1849) who lived at 394 Washington Street, overlooking Mill Pond. His miniature junk, not mentioned by Babson or any of the historians of Cape Ann, is pictured in a lithograph competently drawn by his brother-in-law Lodowick Bradford and entitled 'Mills, Riverdale, 1849' (collection of Paul Harling of Riverdale)."*

Ten Pound Island. . .back from Federal Government. . .

During 1957 the island, once the site of a federal lighthouse, a keeper's cottage and fish hatchery, reverted to the city. The hatchery buildings had fallen into disrepair and had become rat-infested. In June of 1964, the city decided to burn the hatchery to the ground. Olson attempted to stop the "bon fire," as the city advertised it, with a court injunction (ironically, on the very day his second wife, Betty Kaiser, was buried), but the conflagration had already begun. (See Olson's letter of October 28, 1968, "Restore 10 lb. Island house.")

Stacy Boulevard. . .

Runs along Gloucester's outer harbor to Stage Fort Park, past the Fisbermen's Monument and the Essex Avenue entrance to the city on Route 1-A; an esplanade lined with street lights and wooden benches.

Jim Chum. . .

Historian Joseph E. Garland (The Lone Voyager, That Great Patillo, *et al) believes this story to be apocryphal. There are various accounts of men getting tangled in the trawl, a series of hooked and baited lines, while*

fishing, he notes (communication of December 5, 1988), but no record of anyone swimming three miles. (Dories were virtually unsinkable and could be hung onto while awaiting rescue by the mother vessel.) Olson may have picked this yarn up during his many visits to the now-defunct Master Mariner's Association rooms on Main Street between 1957 and 1962 where he often went to learn about the heydays of Gloucester fishing, or at the Fishermen's Institute, a long-time bethel for retired fishermen, on Duncan Street, since demolished. There is no record of a "Jim Chum" in any of the standard documents of the Gloucester fisheries.

preservations. . . historical commissions. . .

The poet had little use for the newly established Gloucester Historical Commission (perhaps because he, who knew local history better than any of its members, was not appointed to it), which was originally chartered to protect the city's historical properties like the razed Davis-McMillan house, but had, at this time, accomplished little more than preparing a list of those worth preserving, many of which have since been lost.

Poet takes a Gloucester walk—
February 12, 1968 [February 7, 1968]

'A sense of auspice of life and being. . .'

Letter 1

Dear Editor:

happy poet like my friend Stephen Jonas the Boston poet says. I was raised over the Cut and except for the Parsons-Morse house I tried to buy last year and a gambrel Ray Morrison covered up a few years back, there never has been any reason to talk about the light, or at least the house's as fixing it, by texture or color or by their dignity or loveliness in shape or bearing—what arrests one this side of the River, at so many turns of heights and streets and lying of the land and abruptness smallness a little street like lower Hancock which not so many years ago was simply Sea Street. Or Short is still Short. And Mansfield Place—or equally (coming into Western at the Boulevard Grocery) Mansfield Way.

I'm up this morning at dawn and my whole soul cries out again, looking out my door and seeing the early morning sun so differently striking the (Puritan) Hotel I better call the ancient Gloucester House brick—how rosy red that is brick as against the Mansfield house's dark red's blood red's brick.

Or I was away most of last week and on Saturday, in the morning, walk up again into town, cutting through Tallys to swing on to Main, cross over into the sun on the northerly side and go along to post my letters at the Bob's Haberdashery box—and up upper Hancock to my doctor's. Returning, stop in Connors for a gingerale and then equally paced start home.

And that shore-path, curving still right now as she was laid out 326 years back gave me again as I think it has never failed, a sense of auspice of life and being I don't even know the equivalent of, down and over the Earth's cities in Central America. Or Rome West Berlin London. San Francisco New York. Washington, New Orleans, Montreal, Seattle—West Newbury—Dorchester England Weymouth England both of which latter places Gloucester principally sprang from.

And I have objective proof I do not speak alone personally: on Pleasant Street in a house there is a painting of exactly those differences of light on brick, and in the cluster as the width and winding of Main Street still holds and shows it—and of course the light on the white shapely houses too, this rarest of all paintings of just this ***gloire*** of Gloucester I can look out or walk out and find

and for all pious people who think that history is problems, and that we must now live, and with problems, Fitz Hugh Lane's immaculate

retention in paint of what is still my eye awakened this morning, out my door, or my blood, Saturday morning, walking it until I have lived on an ability and plane of 48 hours of maximum production and human joy (it is now Monday AM 7:45) I say shoo: this is, and can't be bettered. Kiss Joy, as it flies a greater poet than I can ever be said just when [just] what happily in Gloucester is still at stake was being rifled in the world, from each of us, for the first time.

CHARLES OLSON

He also said, some years later, in his preface to his poem "Milton" (I owe the knowledge of this quote to another friend, [&] poet, a London poet Michael Horovitz)

"Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, in the Court & the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call. Sculptors! Architects! Suffer not the fashionable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for the contemptible works, or the expensive advertising boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of Men whose whole delight is in Destroying."

Letter 2—later

It is like a whole alphabet: [w]hen Gloucester loses her alleys, and masses of buildings (which carry these incrementals, as well as like dishes and spoons receive each day now as they have often before the same shovelfuls of snow etc.—I actually mean of course as much more as well, the violets of light) the way a pansy joins its stalk, and nods there, in its head so very rarely, as human heads can do. There was a kitchen garden by a house right next to Birdseyes just recently removed where each early summer I cld be sure, one day, to be bombed right out, walking up Commercial Street, by suddenly a poppy, maybe one or two more, lying there up on its stalk like crepe paper, and swinging, in the least of all possible air, in a mad dance of toss and tremor. And the woman who had those seeds there as well as tomatoes, knew it.—It['s] a million worlds is tied up in what's being dolled-up—and that I am talking about.

the Cut. . .

That part of Gloucester west of the Blynman Canal, specifically in local usage those neighborhoods encompassed by the Causeway at Essex Avenue, Kent Circle, Western Avenue to Bond Street and the Stage Fort Park-Stage Fort Avenue area.

Parsons-Morse house. . .

See "Poet asks public to call council," August 8, 1967

this side of the River. . .

Gloucester side of "Cut" or Blynman Canal linking outer harbor with Annisquam River.

lower Hancock. . .Short. . .Mansfield Place. . .

Original Gloucester streets and ways in inner city.

Boulevard Grocery. . .

On corner of Mansfield Street (Olson mistakenly refers to it as Mansfield Way) and Western Avenue, across the Stacy Boulevard from Fishermen's Monument.

Puritan Hotel. . .

Or Gloucester Hotel, now restored as Blackburn Tavern on the corner of Main and Washington street.

Mansfield house. . .

See "Poet begs for action to save beauty," January 18, 1968.

Tally[']s. . .

Gas station-auto repair shop on Commercial Street, owned by Taliadoros family (see "Poet appeals to Gloucester landowner," October 25, 1967).

Bob's Haberdashery. . .

Clothing store owned by Robert Kramer, located on corner of Hancock and Main streets.

my doctor's. . .

Dr. Ever L. Curtis, at 90 Middle Street. Olson was also treated by Drs. Walter O'Donnell and Peter S. New, currently of Cape Ann Medical Center, Blackburn Industrial Park, but with offices at 106 Bass Avenue in 1968, especially during the last year of his life and directly before he left Gloucester for Storrs, Connecticut in September of 1969.

the Earth's cities. . .

Olson lists the various cities and towns he had lived in or visited in his lifetime up to then, most recently Dorchester and Weymouth in England where, in 1967, he did research on Gloucester's earliest settlers.

Connor's. . .

Pharmacy and soda fountain, formerly Sullivan's Drug Store, on Main Street, next to "Waiting Station," (see Maximus, *Letter 3, pp. 9-12).*

on Pleasant street. . .

Cape Ann Historical Association at 27 Pleasant Street. Painting referred to is probably Gloucester Harbor, *1852, by Fitz Hugh Lane, owned*

by the city of Gloucester and on deposit at the museum. According to curator Martha Oaks, "the center of the canvas shows the sun streaming down on the central part of the downtown area. Buildings (brick and wood) are all very carefully detailed." (Communication of January 6, 1989.)

a greater poet than I can ever be. . .

William Blake (1757-1827). English poet, artist and engraver.

a kitchen garden. . .

Home of Frontiero family (see "When do poppies bloom," Maximus, *p. 550).*

Birdseyes. . .

The present O'Donnell-Usen fish processing plant on Commercial Street, site of the first experiments by Clarence Birdseye that produced "quick-" or "flash-frozen" fish and, later, other products.

Olson's letter, one of his major statements about Gloucester's sense of place and his own in it, was followed by a letter from Robert L. Hogg, then a graduate student in the Department of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Headlined "Real importance of Gloucester," it reads in part:

> Editor, Gloucester Times:
>
> I would like to commend you for your editorial, "Gloucester's Own West End Story," in the Jan. 18 Times. It is a courteous introduction to Mr. Olson's letter on the same page, and a succinct and constructive article on the problems redevelopment presents in the West End of your city. I hope you will continue in your endeavor to make present to the townspeople of Gloucester the importance of their city's history.
>
> Gloucester is a place, in America, as few places are; and Mr. Olson's respect and concern—or do you more rightly call it love—for this place, from its founding to the present, have engaged the interest of many who otherwise might think of Gloucester only as an East Coast resort. The real importance of Gloucester, in the total history of America, may yet be a thing to come. . .

Poet pleads for Essex Ave. "patch"
May 30, 1969 [May 22, 1969]

Editor, Gloucester Times:

The soul of man is worth more than the sale of automobiles. What is already being permitted to happen back of Essex Avenue toward Western, and to Bond's Hill, is destructive [destruction] of what is so valuable one cannot even imagine the damage.

I am aware that clearing, and [&] ditching has been neglected there for years—or in fact we have not imagined yet what care it does take now to keep such things as marshes, back-water and refuse-spots as open as they now must be attended, people themselves are so numerous, accidental and [&] themselves empty of their own experience. Money in fact should be allotted to this unkemptness as a part literally of loan, and [&] investment, into and [&] of the ["]commons["] of this city.

What I cannot resist warning, is that this particular stretch and the crazy secret old small causeway, branch of the old causeway Essex Avenue itself is?, [is] conceivably one of the "True" patches left of a bundle of nature that close in within "houses" of the full life of the city—not tucked away somewhere, and [&] treated as though it were invalid land. The birds alone, in that patch, are such as meadows have been, and if a decent sweep of cleaning were done to the water the brightness there which sparkles still for me, a heron, some red-wing blackbirds, several hornets sweeping down the run of that small raised path—like such as used to connect directly through the jungle such top Mayan cities as Uxmal and Kabah—belongs to men women boys and [&] girls unknown in the ludicrous anal goodness *or* vicious commercial ambitiousness of the city today.

I pled once that this part of the city be left alone: already wretchedness has been practiced, and [&] should be enjoined. I am asking now that the [C]ity regard herself, in the mirror. She looks bad, there.

CHARLES OLSON

Having already pleaded in vain in his letter of October 25, 1967 for the Taliadoros family not to fill an area of marsh on the Essex Avenue causeway to expand their automobile business, Olson, in what was to be his final letter

to the editor, asks that the one remaining parcel of wetlands on Essex Avenue, containing, in his words, "the crazy secret old small causeway," which led from Essex Avenue west across the marsh to Bond Street, be left untouched after being cleaned of the litter and trash that had accumulated there during years of local neglect.

Uxmal and Kabah...

Ancient Mayan cities which Olson knew from his time spent in Yucatan from February to July in 1951.

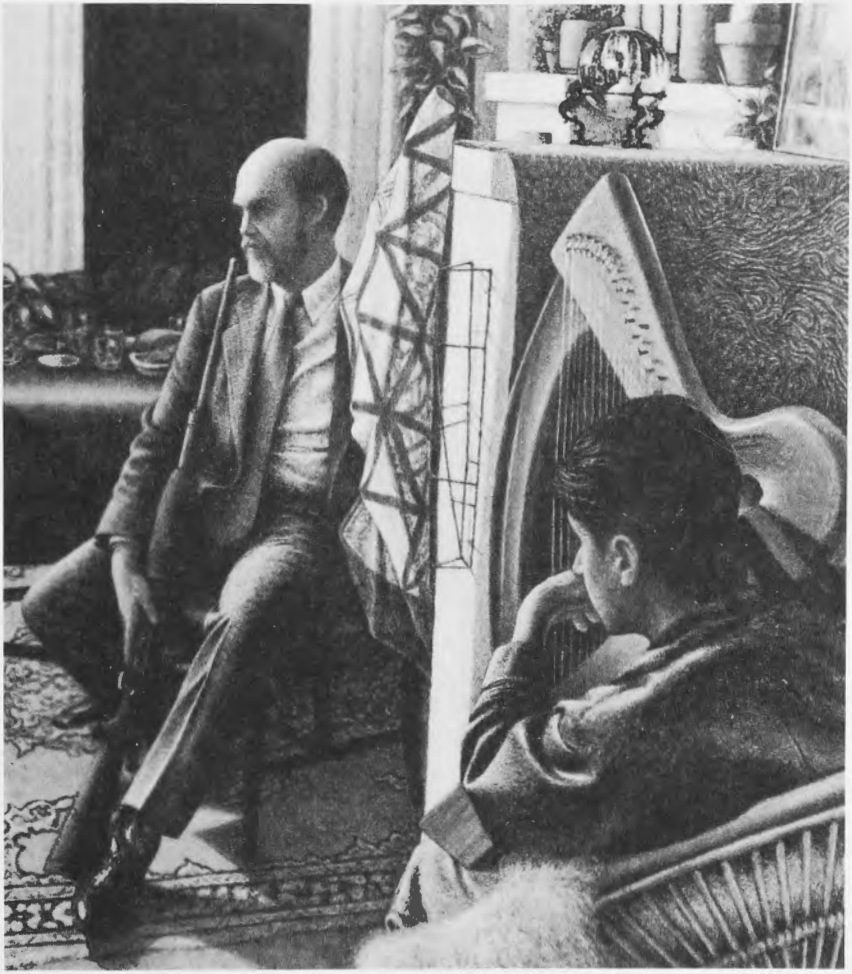
On the same page, an editorial headed "Poet sees more than meets the eye," reads in part:

> Poet Charles Olson's sombre (sic) warning to fellow lovers of Gloucester expressed in a letter to the editor on this page is perhaps the most important communication in this newspaper.
>
> Its wording requires and deserves receptive attention. He's talking about land on Essex Avenue near the causeway between the Annisquam and the rise bordering Marshfield and Bond Streets.
>
> Olson sees Gloucester differently from most of us. He sees a concentration of life, a capsule of history, in old Gloucester and he is sad to see what a mess is made of precious possessions.
>
> His disgust over sloppiness and deliberate degradation of the earth is shared by some who shy from his perceptive poetry, though they might well enjoy it if they but gave it as much attention as a clever TV commercial.
>
> Do Gloucester people want the approaches to their hometown to look as ugly as dollar-hungry developments on Route 1 in the Lynnfield-Saugus area?
>
> On Route 1 there is economic reason for cluttering the landscape with shops and gas stations and restaurants and other business enterprises: the traffic is so heavy that there is transient trade to be extracted. But Gloucester does not have such heavy traffic.
>
> Gloucester's wealth is in natural beauty and attractive places for people to live, work and play.
>
> Homes and yards are generally well kept and clean. Children are well dressed and well fed. Cars are kept clean. Litter control is improving.

But in some of the most prominent locations in the whole city, unsightly conditions are allowed to exist and to grow worse. . .

Ironically, a decade later the city would construct a federally-mandated sewage treatment plant on the very land Olson wrote about in his letter. The Taliadoros brothers were granted a permit to fill adjacent wetlands (the subject of Olson's letter of October 25, 1967) to expand their automobile dealership and used car lot (sold, as of 1991, for a three-screen movie complex) and the Essex Avenue causeway is lined on the river side with marinas, a motel/boatel and a restaurant. Only a small portion of the original wetland remains, and Olson's "crazy secret old small causeway" has disappeared forever.

WES CHRISTENSEN
FOUR PAINTINGS



COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

Watercolor & gouache, 6" x 5¼"
1989

COVERT OPERATION (I SAM. 24)

Watermedia, pencils, 5" x 7"
1991

HAARLEM

Watercolor & gouache, 4" x 5⅞"
1982

PURPLE HEART

Watercolor & gouache, 4¾" x 6"
1986, Ackerman Collection

GERALD M. ACKERMAN

HERCULES EVER AT THE CROSSROADS: Moral Dilemmas of Modern Life in the Paintings of Wes Christensen

Everything is remarkable about the paintings of Wes Christensen: the size, miniature or less; the media, a mixture of colored pencil and watercolor; the draughtsmanship, refined past normal eye-sight; and the invention itself: real-life situations in ordinary settings, sometimes with carefully described accessories which may be either accidents of environment or symbols. The paintings are very small, ranging from 3 by 3 inches or less to at the most a grandiose 10 by 14 inches. The figures are often cropped, leaning into the picture from outside the frame. They are seen in rooms filled with objects: some useful, some symbolic, others enigmatic; the rooms are often illuminated by the yellow, incandescent glow of indoor lighting. Other scenes are set in the bright intensity of the outdoors. And the figures are usually active: even in repose; there is energy even when their activity is reduced to states such as melancholy, concentration or fear.

Although we cannot say that Wes Christensen is part of a school, he is one of several young figure painters of Los Angeles, all of whom have had both to conquer their modern academic training in order to paint figures and to ignore the modern hostility against the practice. All of them work in strong, individually developed styles and use personally discovered techniques. Most of them know each other; they all have reservations about each other's work—for they all see figures differently, not having established any norm or set of rules to help them balance correctness of sight with grace of presentation. Each embraces or avoids ugliness in nature in a distinct way. Consequently, they cannot criticize each other very helpfully, but they can encourage each other; and occasionally they exhibit together. Their leader should have been the late Joyce Treiman, a venerable local painter who persisted in painting figures through the previous decades of abstraction—the fifties, sixties and seventies when it was a painful experience, her friends thought she was mad—but her work is probably too touched by abstraction, anyway, to inspire them, although her personal example should. Unlike her, these young painters put their figures into situations where each must think and act independently. They know it was the habit of older painters to use a moral dilemma to give their pictures tension or meaning; they want to avoid the brainless realism of

some modern "realist" figure painters who paint what seem like stuffed models, clothed and costumed, placed in various poses in various parts of the house. Jon Swihart paints in oils slightly larger figures groups in religious situations so ecumenical they include pagan rites and gods. His figure style is quite different from Christensen's. He seldom crops, liking whole figures animated anatomically, not by lighting. And F. Scott Hess works on an enormous scale, five and six foot wide canvases of simultaneously horrible and hilarious southern Californian domestic situations painted in a wild, loose style in German Neo-expressionist colors. These artists have been met, recently, by a Californian working on the East Coast, Kate Doyle, whose figures, though often reclining or sitting in interiors, are full of the power of individual thought and feeling. All of them paint situations which seem to put their figures to test, morally, spiritually. The great thing is that they all know what to do with figures, an aptitude which many thought was lost forever.

This is not a "revival" of figure painting; it is a thoroughly modern continuation. Wes Christensen is not going back to some dead standards; nor is he chewing up and regurgitating a mangled tradition that mixes the prejudices of modernity with recognizable bits of human forms, as in the "[San Francisco] Bay Area Figure Revival" of the sixties, which was born out of Abstract Expressionism. Christensen works in a tradition that he has never considered dead: for him, Thomas Eakins, the "American Scene Painters," and others bridge over abstraction back to Copley's *Watson and the Shark* which he considers the greatest American painting. Christensen's instinct has picked the right masterpiece; Copley's painting signals the change from the depiction of universal themes to individual destinies, something that happens at this time in literature as well as in painting.

Intuitively, Christensen has accepted a truism of most art historians, that "modern art" or the modern age started in the Age of Revolutions, somewhere around 1775 (*Watson and the Shark* is dated 1878). This is a difficult idea for the general public that prefers to see the beginning of modern art a century later in a struggle between the Impressionists and the academics; it does not like to think modern art was started by the President of the Royal Academy.

The questions to be explored in art for Christensen are the unclear existential problems of daily life, not matters of style. These problems were pondered before that revolt as questions of a universal religion; now they are dilemmas of personal decision. The theme hitherto in almost all figure painting was the relationship of man to God's plan; now it is the relationship of one person to the present situation or to another person. As Watson dangles over the shark, is he thinking about God's will or his own personal safety?

Like Hercules, Christensen's figures are often at the crossroads, trying to decide between the Path of Virtue and the Path of Vice. For instance, *The*

Letter of 1982 (not reproduced) depicts a seated woman examining an unopened letter, another woman stands behind her, hovering over her; we know she has brought the letter to the woman because she echoes the position of the servant delivering a letter to her mistress in Vermeer's *Woman and Maid* in the Frick Collection in New York City. The sudden physical lassitude of the Frick recipient (and our knowledge of the situations in the some other dozen similar works by Vermeer) lets us recognize her moral situation: an assignation, the letter is in the line of the message which King David sent to Bathsheba. But Christensen's recipient holds a cocked pistol in her other hand: a symbol? a sign of anger? or of action? The world and its choices are not so simple. Instead of a clear set of rules of right and wrong—as in Vermeer's world—there are many courses of action for Christensen's characters, each with a separate consequence. And is it action or morality that is the question here? I think Christensen wants the interpretation of the viewer to be as difficult as the decision for the actor.

As for his own art-historical position, Christensen will say he works in the tradition of "narrative panting." He uses the term counter to the professional usage—which describes a series of paintings telling a story step by step, as say in *The Life of Christ* on the back of the *Maestà* of Duccio, or the *Story of the True Cross* on the walls of San Francesco in Arezzo by Piero della Francesca. In the recent past, the term was used by several lazy critics for genre paintings which they could not fit into their perceived "main line of development," particularly applied to some British genre painters of the 19th century whose work did not seem to agree with continental developments. Christensen's own meaning is revealed by his preference for Rembrandt's biblical scenes over those of say Raphael or Michelangelo; he sees Rembrandt's biblical scenes in contrast to theirs as "narrative paintings," meaning that he prefers paintings in which the human element can be read foremost, ignoring—where possible—the allegorical element so powerful in the work of the Italian masters. In academic classification, the biblical scenes of all three artists would be called "History Pictures."

Countertransference is a direct homage to a work long attributed to Rembrandt, the *David playing for King Saul* in The Hague. The picture easily read in terms of the emotions of the two characters is not, however, simply a story, a narrative. The young David with the purity of his song moves the jealously hostile King Saul to cry; at the same time the King is holding the spear that he will soon in a rage aim and throw at the young singer. Like most biblical histories from the 17th century, the work can be read on many levels: an allegory on the unreliability of melancholic genius (Saul), the pain of falling from grace, the conflict of innocence and decadence; and for moderns, as a paradigm of paranoia, for Saul, jealous

of the young hero's fame, projects his own hostility on David, and imagining that the young man intends to kill him, tries to kill him first. Christensen's has posed the characters as in the Berlin picture, but painted them from a different angle, and a shotgun—unfailing hostility—replaces the lance. Thus the "countertransference" is both psychological and physical. The sulking "King Saul" is one of his most fully-realized figures.

Even more Rembrandtesque is *Covert operation;* its sub-title of "I Samuel 24" allows us a quick reference to the Bible so that we can ascertain the identification of the scene as David trimming the cloak of Saul, rather than a new or Freudian interpretation of the history of Samson and Delilah (Judges 16). Actually, Christensen has conflated two similar stories about Saul and David. In the biblical account which Christensen cites, David is hiding in the cave from the hostile Saul, when Saul enters the cave to relieve himself; David, hidden in darkness, cuts off a piece of his garment, which he later shows to the King as evidence of his lack of malice and hostility and of his peaceful intentions. A second version (I Samuel 26) has David—still on the run—creep into Saul's camp at night where he finds the monarch sleeping; he takes away a spear and a water jug from near the sleeping Saul, retreats to outside the camp, and again challenges the King while displaying his modest trophies: "I could have killed you but I have no malice for the Lord's anointed." For Christensen the story has the moral that negotiations are preferable to war; he painted the scene during the Gulf War. But another layer is suggested because it is a woman—rather than a young man—doing the cutting, and so close to the genital area as to hint at castration, prominent in the story of Osiris, hidden in the story of the drunkenness of Noah, and perhaps adumbrated in the story of Samson and Delilah. So perhaps it is also a comment on the female role in the war between men and women.

The meanings of the action become even more difficult to unravel, impossible even, when one learns that all the characters in his paintings are friends of Christensen. Did he choose them to pose because of fortuitous thematic agreements, or through intuitively sensed appropriateness, or simply out of convenience? Mysterious personal relationships between the models and Christensen might be the tonic note in the mysterious discord between the black male saxophonist and his estranged white girlfriend in *Haarlem*. They are in the interior of a Dutch church—presumably in the European Haarlem and probably a citation from a painting by Saerendam. Does the setting suggest the sacredness of the relationship, and the saxophone its profane quality? Her blouse is decorated with a mixed black and white pattern.

Again in the now lost *Research*, which measured five inches by five, a man and a woman are seen before a building. This time a sort of pre-Colombian building whose dark entryway encloses a young girl in shorts.

The two, presumably archaeologists, face each other; she oblivious of the man, sits and looks through a Meso-American manuscript; he, on one knee before her, a machete over his left shoulder like a sword of honor, earnestly offers her an ear of corn. There is another ear of corn, on the chair beside her; its form is echoed by a spindle on a small table. Is he courting her, offering a phallic symbol? Does the dark entry of the tomb or palace (at which the proffered ear points) represent the mysteries of sex? Or are they simply discussing the importance of corn in pre-Colombian civilizations, looking at an old text for confirming information? As one studies the pictures, multiple meanings come to one's attention simultaneously with the appreciation of the details. Still the machete is menacing, although peacefully held; there are many weapons and possible weapons in the hands of Christensen's actors, sometimes proffered, sometimes exposed, sometimes held behind the back.

In *Purple Heart* the title at once lets you know this is a moment in a war, and that a wound has been received during an act of bravery. Two young two men have evidently taken refuge in a private, carefully managed garden, where they repose on neatly laid out blankets on a concrete ledge as one binds a wound on the other's arm. The ministering man is obviously a punk from his extravagant Mohawk hairdo; the other is, curiously, partially dressed—he wears only a colored t-shirt. But that the revealing nudity is not fortuitous is brought out by a faucet among the garden plants, an old pun for the penis, literal in some languages, visual in many works of art, and one that even the tradition-innocent can recognize. What was the fight about? A street riot of punks in some suburban area? The result of gay-bashing? Were they caught by homophobes in *flagrante delicto?* Or is it simply representative of the loving care gays give their sick brothers in this time of plague? The homo-eroticism is clear on levels of lust and tenderness and absolutely certain to those who recognize the underlining scheme of the early red-figured painting of Achilles binding the wounds of Patroclus in the bowl of the Sosias Kylix in Berlin (ca. 510 BC). The pose of the two figures is almost the same; the great crest of the Achilles's helmet is echoed in the full-arc of the Mohawk hair cut; and similarly the genitalia of Patroclus displayfully dangles from under a short skirt of leather thongs. So the homo-erotic quality sensed in *Purple Heart* is backed up by the ghosts of Achilles and Patroclus, who, along with Jonathan and David, are archetypal male lovers.

Of course such an image takes literary and art-historical information to crack it. Why not? But it still can be read as an emotional situation.

Wes Christensen's small paintings are not to be easily dismissed; their seriousness is compelling, their skill assuring, their drawing convincing, their compositions challenging, and their detail fascinating. The small size makes seeing an effort, and turns seeing into thinking. The drawing is

usually accurate on the surface of things, for Christensen was not schooled in figure drawing by a strict master of the old school—no one is anymore. He has developed his figure style from a study of old masters and from photographs. He has taken as inspiration the miniature style of Franz van Mieiris the Elder and of Vermeer (although Vermeer did not paint many miniatures, he used a miniaturist's technique—that is, he painted with fine, almost invisible brushes, and was exacting in his detail and the reception of light). Christensen derived his technique—of building up his forms with many layers of transparent and opaque water colors—from certain masters of the English School of the 19th century, the much collected if not popularly known William Henry ("Birdnest") Hunt and Myles Birket Foster, but of whom heavily employed stippling, as Christensen does. He fortunately has a small but faithful following of collectors in Los Angeles, and the enthusiastic comradeship of local artists with parallel if not exactly similar interests; he is young, and devoted to his work. In his paintings he explores not only his personal interests and reactions to the world about him, but he backs up his interests with a large range of art-historical and literary reference. We must admit now that subjective and abstract art is not for everyone, that young artists enamored of the physical world should no longer be discouraged from studying and portraying it.

BOB PERELMAN
VIRTUAL REALITY

It was past four when we
found our feet lifted above our

accelerators, only touching them at intervals.
Inside, our car radios were displaying

the body of our song, marked
with static from Pacific storms. Outside

was the setting for the story
of our life: Route 80 near

Emeryville—fence, frontage road, bay, hills,
billboards changing every two months—though

the background would never stay in
focus for very long. It was

the present, but stopped so short
it seemed to have been there

forever. We weren't pleased with the
choice of words, stations, or storms,

and our desire was pushed into
corners of our song, where it

clung self-consciously to the rhythm-fill, or
the bass line or the patent

scratch in the voice as it
tried to push the big moments

of the lyrics over the hump.
We were stacked up and our

path was jammed negotiation for every
forward foot. Any hope of automatic

writing, of turning the wheel freely
in a narrative of open possibility,

was a joke. Witness the impotent
speedometer, the ominous odometer. The fallen

leaves in the ads, lifting
in slow motion as the BMW

cornered away from us at forty,
only made it worse. Person-minutes inched

forward animating an eighty-year video while
memorized circles continued radiating from memorized

fairs where barkers were offering antique
pleasures: candy apples, Skee-Ball, two-headed sheep,

the Cave Woman. When she broke
her chains and started thumping her

plexiglass cage, the barker would shout,
"We can't control her!" The lights

would go out, and we would
stumble towards the exits, every hour

on the hour. But the show
didn't end like that. We fashioned

nooses out of coded nursery twine,
whipped up stampedes of ghost dancers

out of TV talent hoppers. We
couldn't quite see them, but we

knew they were there by how
touchy the phrases felt: "Sit." "Strip."

"Heel." "Roll over." The commands we
gave our body made it gape,

excited, in the way: a dog
in a porn movie. The sounds

sounded without prior sense. We could
see hands seizing towers, chains, dealerships,

the structures that gave our machines
their names and desires. They floated

longingly above the road. The past
was still waiting for us, permanently

unfaithful it seemed, but there was
no time to read, only to

react, as the global information net
had grown fascinated with our body's

every move, smashing at it with
videotaped sticks, validating it, urging credit,

free getaways, passionate replacement offers. Personal
gulfs beckoned with dark blue water.

MICHAEL PALMER
CITES

Sphères : Spheres
Brisées : Traces
Survies : Survivals

***

"The sun beat down through a
sky that had never seen clouds."
—James Gleick, *Chaos*

***

"the mark multiplied"
—for Micaëla Henich

can lie, but
under the grey
a part seen
is spherical, is
unearthed, all smoke
an unbridgeable gulf
arched and taut
preceded this gazing
anemone and the
but the buried
strands, salty to
harbors and their
space constructed of
and the cawing
wrack, wheeling of
rising over the

in its parabolic
walls and our
as if in
if no such
and aloud, returning
actual blue and
meant as witness
but the body
all smoke, blue
just so far
severed, its neck
because a focus
plaits, calcined walls
seems to be
or alternate flooding
rushes were once
absence of certain
or cling there
but another part
our distance to
patterns he can
as a net
dark, swallowing itself
of grey, spun
without legs or
shadows appear to
one sheltered against
smoked mirrors which
an hypothesis and
bits of bone
from ferrous mud
the mark multiplied
hull, hollow but
sea always seemed
to count them
buried there had
centuries, although they
thicker making it
fanned or flayed

les pierrailles les
against the fallen
as if blood
retreat into their
were to knot
where it falls
du large qui
spiral of dark
is subject to
sea to intermittent
remains attached to
an etching on
from a vortex
perspective of duration
where it spills
to penetrate between
slow and measured
est creusé dans
at intervals as
to read the
levels to extreme
through its ribs
so shapes its
neither our nor
will die if
glasswort or samphire
where the black
with perfect blades
the direction they
at each margin
cycle, the missing
when their plumes
the most, inscribed
page of a
and who before
a desire no
outcome of differences
their boundaries which
flicker over it

but the sudden
two-note calls are
as if bodies
channels that they
as when ash
que mes yeux
where clear green
mineral crust had
the mouths of
waiting to be
displacement by degrees
and rill marks
discover a thin
assembles in negative
dust pulled from
citron, actual word
tongue which will
of this sudden
its world, before
arrival of a
so shapes its
twin in its
bare line of
from the crest
an E or
the spine of
there (as Daive
the peat that
and the dispersal
registered as time
an x set
nothing but ink's
or beyond it
called the whorl
single or in
dark as our
to gravity so
can still see
and position for

may retain much
where no oxygen
wash ashore after
and almost iridescent
quickens and subsides
if the possible
wherever such tremors
then resurface as
sheered at an
as if signs
seen from above
and without thought
carries an atmosphere
where shore encircled
an equilibrium determined
to flood the
body, threads of
into its forked
surely it never
read as traces
since the wind
the water boatmen
so wantonly along
sun without its
dark twin to
imagine a red
the sphere forms
there in fragments
or a mill?
where tides often
so elder, groundsel
(a spell of
or itself surrounded
messages children had
color (for instance)
or else imagined?
what the names
one speaks one
different when I

windrow of rock
the sign R
(found only where
is not seen
that a word
is always supposed
to be possible
but can we
not sometimes speak
of a darkening
not sometimes feel
like saying if
we were without
memory we would
find ourselves there
mantled by a
violent night sky
above those same
cliffs, ochre and
silver, scored with
jagged rivulets, remnants
of a stair
or slatted fence
and beyond, rutted
walkways by walls
the door's A
prolapsed in shadow
a raised arm

TWO POEMS *from* BHARTRIHARI

(Tr. from the Sanskrit by Andrew Schelling)

Dug into earth's crust
for drug stone,
turned mountains to ash looking for metal,
followed rivers back to their source.
Then groveled woefully
before kings.
Hooked on spells,
hung up on weird arts
I wandered the burning grounds—
but never shed craving—
never obtained a single pierced
cowry shell.

Grieve, brother—
great was the king with his
inner circle,
flanked by wizards,
pale women, proud warriors,
scribes setting it down
as it happened.
Bow to time—
a whole kingdom

swept into memory, onto the pathway
of legend.

Two figures known as Bhartrihari appear in India about the same time, one the author of an astute and elegant grammar, the other a poet who left three hundred poems grouped thematically into three books: Counsel, Romance, Renunciation. The Chinese pilgrim I-ching, traveling India 671-695 C.E. and picking up legend as he could, considered linguist and poet the same man—a man who seven times swung between a scholar's position at court and the bark-clad anchorite's life. Buddhist? So says the Chinese traveler—the broodings on vanity, on evanescence, would seem to attest it. Yet some of the poems speak of "moon-crested Shiva" and of wandering along sanctified rivers. Translated into Dutch in 1651, into German in 1663, Bhartrihari was the first poet from India to cross the frontier into a European tongue. Fitting—if he was in fact also the renowned scholar of languages.

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ELIOT WEINBERGER
DREAMS FROM THE HOLOTHURIANS

> The ocean covers 73% of the earth's surface and over 80% of this surface is a soft-sediment-covered sea floor. This is the home of the abyssal holothurians. These animals are the most evident organisms seen in abyssal photographs, and the combination of these circumstances lead one to the inescapable conclusion that holothurians are the dominant large animals of the major part of the earth's surface. Holothurians feeding on bottom sediments mix and till the surface mud on an enormous scale, producing features more widespread and more visibly evident than those produced by any other animal on earth.

Two globe-headed divers walk on the ocean floor, attached by rubber hoses to their mother-ship, a small but luxuriously appointed submarine. Though tens of thousands of fathoms down, the scene is bright with the reddish glow of burning lava from an undersea volcano:

> There indeed before my eyes, ruined, destroyed, lay a town, its roof open to the sky, its temples fallen, its arches dislocated, its columns lying on the ground, from which one could still recognize the massive character of Tuscan architecture. Further on, some remains of a giant aqueduct; here the high base of an Acropolis, with the floating outline of a Parthenon; there traces of a quay, as if an ancient port had formerly abutted on the borders of the ocean, and disappeared with its merchant vessels and its war-galleys. Further on again, long lines of sunken walls and broad, deserted streets—a perfect Pompeii escaped beneath the waters. Such was the sight that Captain Nemo brought before my eyes!
>
> Where was I? Where was I? I must know at any cost. I tried to speak, but Captain Nemo stopped me with a gesture, and picking up a piece of chalkstone, advanced to a rock of black basalt, and traced the one word:

ATLANTIS

Atlantis!

Why did the Hebrews, Aztecs, Chaldeans, Arameans, Maya, Hindus, Toltecs, Zoroastrians, Chippewas, Greeks and Delawares all have myths of a great flood?

Why did both the Egyptians and the Mesoamericans build pyramids?

Why did the Egyptians, the Inca and the Maya all employ the arch?

Why did the Mexicans believe their culture-hero Quetzacoatl came from the East? And why is he depicted with a beard?

Atlantis! Herodotus tells of a people in the west, the Atarantes, who have no names for individuals, and who curse the sun at noon for its heat. And west of them are the Atlantes, named for Mt. Atlas, which they call the Pillar of Heaven and whose peak is permanently hidden in the clouds. A people who eat no living thing, and never dream.

Why did the Egyptians, the Guanches of the Canaries and the Peruvians all mummify their dead?

Why did the Aztecs believe that they originally came from a place called *Aztlan*?

Where did the Phoenicians get their alphabet?

Why did the Egyptians paint themselves as red men?

Who were the Aryans?

Atlantis! Plato hears Socrates tell of a story passed down through generations from Solon, who heard it from Egyptian priests. That beyond the Pillars of Hercules there was an island larger than Libya and Asia put together; that it was the way to other islands, and beyond them another continent; that it was rich in fruits, elephants, and the mysterious gleaming red mineral *orichalc*. An island ruled by Poseidon, who had five sets of male twins and divided the kingdom among them, naming the land after the eldest, Atlas. That nine thousand years ago, Atlantis, having conquered Egypt and half of Italy, waged war on Athens—that is, the original, lost city of Athens—and was defeated. That this once divine race, who had cared nothing for wealth, had become more human and "unseemly." That Zeus had decided to punish them with earthquakes and a flood that destroyed both Atlantis and most of the land of the virtuous Platonic republic of Athens, which had never recovered.

Where was the Garden of Eden, Asgard, Mt. Olympus, the Elysian Fields?

How did the Bronze Age come to Europe without an Age of Copper?

Why is Poseidon, a god of the sea, depicted as driving a chariot drawn by horses?

Why did the medieval monk Cosmos place "the Land where men dwelt before the Flood" on the left side of his map?

What is the origin of the word *Atlantic*? Why is the range in northwest Africa called the *Atlas* mountains?

Why does *atl* mean "water" in the Aztec language?

Why did the Egyptians believe that the underworld was in the West?

Atlantis! Theopompos writes of an Outer Continent, inhabited by people twice our size, and their country called No Return, forever shrouded in red mist, with two rivers, Pleasure and Grief. A land whose giants had come east to pillage, and had found nothing in the Known World worth stealing.

Atlantis! Aristotle says Plato made it up. Amelius says he was talking metaphorically about the stars. Diogenes Laertius says it was merely an ethical dialogue. Iamblichos and Syrianos say it's both true and an allegory. Origenes Adamantius, Numenius, and Porphyrios say it's only an allegory. Arnobius Afer, Krantor, Philo Judaeus, Poseidonios and Tertullian believe him. Plutarch, Strabo and Pliny the Elder say it's doubtful.

Why did the Egyptians erect obelisks inscribed with hieroglyphs and the Mesoamericans erect stelae inscribed with hieroglyphs?

Why did both the ancient Europeans and the ancient Americans bury their dead under mounds? And why did they all bury food, weapons, clothes and trinkets with them?

Why did both the Egyptians and the Peruvians have the plow?

Why is the Aztec flood-survivor named *Nata*, which is almost *Noah?*

Why did the Mandan Indians have blue eyes and venerate an ark called the Big Canoe? And why did they tell the myth of a single white man escaping the great waters?

Francisco López de Gómara found it in America—in 1553 he was the first—and John Dee and Alexander von Humboldt were among his many followers. In 1570 Jean de Serre, known as Serranus, found it in Palestine.

Atlantis! Sir Francis Bacon tells the tale of a ship, blown off course from Peru to China, that lands in Bensalem, founded by refugees from the lost continent. It is a Christian constitutional monarchy, devoted to philosophy and scientific research, which by 1626 had already invented airplanes, submarines and air-conditioning.

Olaüs Rudbeck, a 17th century Swede, studied the *Edda* and found it, and the origin of all European and Asian peoples, in Sweden. A century later Jean Bailly found it first in Mongolia and then in the sea off Spitsbergen, and tried to convince Voltaire.

Why does the Roman god Jove hold thunderbolts in his hand and the Mexican god of thunder, Mixcoatl, hold a bundle of arrows?

Why does the Quran speak of the people of *Ad*, who built the City of Pillars and were destroyed for their wickedness?

Why did the Scythians and the Maya elongate the heads of their babies? And why were the Pharaohs bald with flat foreheads?

Who were *Ad*am, *Ad*onis, the Persian god Mashab-*ad*, and the Hindu gods the *Ad*itya?

Why do Norwegian lemmings swim out to sea, as though looking for a land that is no longer there, circle aimlessly and die?

Hafer, an 18th century Prussian with no first name, found it in Prussia. Francis Wilford, a British officer in India, found it in 1805 off the coast of England, where the events in the Old Testament had taken place, and his theories were picked up by William Blake:

> On those vast shady hills between America and Albion's shore
> Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea, call'd Atlantean hills,
> Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden world,
> An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
> Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God
> By Ariston, the king of beauty, for his stolen bride.

Atlantis!

> In one night the Atlantic Continent was caught up with the Moon
> And became an Opake Globe, far distant, clad with moony beams.

Why did the Assyrians carve reliefs of pineapples?

Why are there crosses in all world religions?

Why did the Hindus have a fish-god?

Why did both the Egyptians and the Peruvians take a census of their people?

Why did the ancient Irish have tobacco pipes?

Why are both the Germans and the American Indians scared of wolves?

Atlantis! John Ruskin harangues a group of businessmen in Bradford: Their temples of gold, their wasting of the countryside, their exploitation of the workers will lead to a calamity like the one the Atlanteans brought upon themselves.

Atlantis! the Catalan Jacínt Verdaguer, chaplain to the Compania Transatlantica, Spiritual Counsellor to the Marqués de Comillas in Havana, writes a Christian-classical nationalist epic: *L'Atlantida*. God punishes Atlantis for its greed, sparing only the virtuous lands of Spain. All of the Atlantean treasures are moved to Iberia, which becomes the Elysian Fields, the source of the Golden Fleece, and all the promised lands of the Egyptians, Hebrews and Greeks. Even the golden orange tree from the Garden of the Hesperides is planted by Hercules in Cadíz. [Though next to it, this being Spain, grows a mysterious deformed tree dripping blood: tears for the Atlantean dead.] Hercules splits the mountains of Atlantis in two, to become the Pillars, and the Mediterranean Sea rushes over the land. He inscribes the words NON PLUS ULTRA on the rock of Gibraltar: no one may venture beyond until peace and purity reign. Cut to Columbus and a crew of united Spaniards—Andalucians, Gallicians, Catalans, Castillians and Cantabrians—praying for safe passage on their way to the new Atlantis.

Why, nearly everywhere, is gold associated with the sun, and silver with the moon?

Why did the American Indians and the ancient Europeans believe in ghosts?

Why did both worlds like to drink fermented intoxicating beverages? And why did both use scales and weights and mirrors?

Why did the American Indians and the ancient Celts draw spirals?

Why did both the Greeks and the people of the Amazon have poison-tipped arrows?

Why did William Penn claim that the Indians of Pennsylvania look like Jews?

Félix Berlioux found it in 1874 near Casablanca, and inspired Pierre Benoit's *L'Atlantide*, the tale of Queen Antinéa with her pet leopard on a leash—filmed by Pabst and Ulmer, and once played by María Montez—whose abandoned lovers, with nothing else to live for, commit suicide and are placed in a vast and crowded crypt.

Atlantis! Its greatest scholar, Ignatius T. T. Donnelly (1831-1901), was Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota, Congressman for eight years, twice a candidate for Vice-President, and wrote a prophetic novel of the coming century that sold a million copies. In other books he proved that the Ice

Age was caused by a collision of the earth and a comet, and that Sir Francis Bacon wrote all of Shakespeare's plays. His masterwork, *The Antediluvian World* (1882), amasses incredible evidence to show that Atlantis was the source of world civilization; that Europe and the Americas were Atlantean colonies, and Egypt the original outpost; that the kings, queens and heroes of Atlantis became the gods and goddesses of world mythology; that the Egyptian and the Peruvian versions were the remnants of the true religion of Atlantis; that the Bronze Age and the alphabet were invented there; and that survivors of the catastrophe spread the tales that became the world myths of the Deluge.

How did Plato know about coconuts?

Why do the Hindus refer to illusion as *Maya*?

Why were animals worshipped in both the New World and the Old? And why did both use dreams for prophesying?

Why does Homer mention an ancient race of navigators named the *Cares*, which is almost *Caribs*?

Why are there three Armenian cities cited by Ptolemy as *Chol, Colua* and *Cholima*, and three Mexican cities named *Cholula, Coluacan* and *Colima*?

Why is "me" *me* in Mandan and *mi*, pronounced "me" in Welsh?

Atlantis! Augustus Le Plongeon, the first to excavate the Maya ruins in the Yucatán, deciphers the glyphs and discovers that they tell the story of the princes Coh and Aac, rivals for the hand of their sister Moo, Queen of Atlantis. Coh is accepted, but is murdered by Aac, whose armies overrun Atlantis as the continent begins to sink. Moo flees to Egypt, where she builds the Sphinx as a monument to her husband/brother, changes her name to Isis, and is the founder of Egyptian civilization. The Greek alphabet, recited in the proper order, is actually a Mayan poem on the fate of Moo.

Why did the American Indians, the Romans and the Chinese venerate their ancestors?

Why did the Phoenicians have an evil spirit named *Zebub*, and the Peruvians an evil spirit named *Cupay*, which sounds different but is in fact the same name?

Why is Quechua so similar to Arabic?

If the Azores are named after *azores*, hawks, then how did the rabbits and mice that hawks eat reach those islands?

Why does Savonarola in his famous portrait look like Sitting-Bull?

Atlantis! In India Madame Blavatsky goes into a trance and receives a palm-leaf book: The *Book of Dzyan*, written in Atlantis in the ancient Senzar language: "The last Vibration of the Seventh Eternity thrills through Infinitude. The Mother swells, expanding from without like the Bud of the Lotus. . . After great throes she cast out her old Three and put on her new Seven Skins, and stood in her First One." There are seven Rounds of Life, and seven Root Races, and seven Sub-Races: astral jellyfish in the Imperishable Sacred Land, and egg-laying hermaphroditic Lemurians with four arms, and Atlanteans of course, and the race that lives under the North Pole.

Lost! Plutarch claimed that Solon began an epic poem on Atlantis, and gave it up. Lost! Plato's account of the continent, *Critias*, ends suddenly in mid-sentence: "And when he had called them together, he spoke as follows:"

Leo Frobenius, the African scholar championed by Pound, found it in Nigeria, along with the city of Tarshish, where Jonah was headed. All civilization, he wrote, had travelled west from a genuinely lost continent in the Pacific; reports of the Yorubas (who were the Atlanteans) had confused them with their Pacific ancestors.

Why did both Roman and Iroquois couples share a piece of food as part of their wedding ceremony?

Why is the Mayan word *hurakan*, god of the storm, so similar to the old Swedish *hurra*, meaning "to be driven along," to *hurry?*

Why did both the Jews and the Mexicans offer water to strangers to wash their feet?

Why did the Maya have a city called *Mayapan*, which is a combination of *Maya* and the Greek god *Pan?*

Why did the Aztecs have an elective monarchy like 19th century Poland?

Why do the Basques speak Algonquin?

Atlantis! Heinrich Schliemann's grandson Paul claims that he inherited a letter, an envelope and an owl-headed vase of unknown provenance. The letter instructed that only a family member willing to devote his life to the material contained in the envelope and vase should open them. He pledged his life, and broke the vase. Inside were four square coins and a metal plaque inscribed in Phoenician, *Issued in the Temple of Transparent Walls.* He opened the envelope, and found his grandfather's secret notes from the excavation of Troy: the finding of a bronze urn full of coins marked *From the King Cronos of Atlantis.* Young Schliemann then set off for Tibet,

where he discovered a Chaldean account of the destruction of the Land of the Seven Cities. Schliemann reports his findings to the *New York American* in 1912, promising to reveal much more in a forthcoming book.

Lost! Sir Francis Bacon never finished *The New Atlantis.*

Paul Borchardt found it in the swamps of Shott el Jerid in Tunisia. Albert Herrmann, a Frisian, found it in Friesland. Victor Bérard found it in Carthage. Ellen Whishaw, director of the Anglo-Spanish-American School of Archeology found an Atlantean outpost in Seville. Count Byron Khun de Prorok found the tomb of its Queen in the Ahaggar Mountains, and claimed the Tauregs as direct descendents.

Lost! William Emmette Coleman, a disgruntled acolyte, decided to devote himself to exposing Madame Blavatsky's plagiarisms in the *Book of Dzyan* from ancient Indian texts. But his library and notes were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake, and he died soon after.

Atlantis! becomes Otlontis which becomes Oluntos which becomes Olumpus, which is Olympus.

Lost! After his newspaper article, Paul Schliemann was never heard from again, his book never published, and the Schliemann family claimed they had no one named Paul.

Atlantis! Rudolf Steiner writes how the Atlanteans had no ability to reason, but that they had trained themselves in the mnemonic arts, and could even pass on their collected memories to their children. When faced with a problem, they found the solution from precedence; but if it was a new problem, they could only experiment blindly. They used words to heal wounds immediately, and flew in aircraft that ran on "life force."

Atlantis! Lewis Spence in 1924 solves the chronological discrepancies between its destruction and the rise of the Mexican and Peruvian civilizations. The earthquake had split the lost continent in two: the eastern island of Atlantis and the western island of Antilia, which was preserved in memory as the Antilles. The Atlanteans invaded Europe, and then, thousands of years later, with the destruction of both continents, the Antilians escaped to the Americas.

Lost! The retired British officer Lieutenant-Colonel Percy H. Fawcett went looking for it in the Amazon in 1925 and never returned. Lost! The French gold-prospector Appollinaire Frot returned from those same jungles

announcing archeological discoveries of such magnitude that he feared the consequences of revealing them, and died soon after.

F. Gidon found it off the coast of Brittany, and declared it French. The Englishman W. C. Beaumont found it in England, "birthplace of all civilization," and proved that the Pillars of Hercules were the English Channel and that Plato's Athens was in Scotland. He synthesized his findings in his life-work, *Britain: The Key to World History.*

Atlantis! In 1929 the backwoods psychic Edgar Cayce predicts its reappearance in 1968. In 1968 massive stone walls are discovered under the waters off Bimini in the Bahamas.

Lost! Manuel de Falla and José María Sert collaborated on a "scenic cantata," *Atlántida*, based on the Verdaguer epic. But Sert died, and then de Falla died, the piece unfinished after eighteen years of work.

John Michell found its remains in the global energy lines of Avebury, Carnac, Giza, Nazca and the whole of China south of the Great Wall, which was "formed to a single design." Charles Berlitz found that it is still there, in the Bermuda Triangle, luring ships down. Erik von Däniken found it in outer space, the planet Atlantis whose spaceship pioneers had first colonized the earth.

Lost Atlantis! It was all a dream from the holothurians. The holothurians, despised by men, called "sea cucumbers" after that insipid vegetable, dismissed as cylindrical purplish blobs, nothing more then a mouth and an anus, forever filtering mud in the gloom of the ocean floor—it was the holothurians who did it. For each is the cell of a huge collective brain, a brain trapped in millions of useless bodies that inhabit the dullest stretches on earth.

So, to amuse itself, this brain has spun stories along its submarine network, stories that bubbled up and randomly entered the dreams of the sleeping people above. Stories that provoked strange longings for the ocean floor: that the origin of all life began there, that forgotten kingdoms lie there in the mud, along with the shipwrecks of fantastic wealth. A dream that Solon and Plato and Bacon and de Falla and the others could only partially remember: they wrote it down, then went to sleep again to recover the rest, and never could. A dream that has led so many to dive into the sea and keep swimming down.

Atlantis! In the dark the holothurians eat and excrete and move on and eat, inching forward, thinking, sending out their mental flares in the hope

that someone, something, anything will drop by and relieve the tedium of their biological fate, down there, at the bottom of the sea, with the calcified sponges, magnesium nodules, the crushed spines of sea urchins, the ghosts of coelenterates, unexploded torpedoes, skeletons of bathypterids and halosaurs, the hieroglyphic tracks of sea pens and ophiuroids, fecal coils, the waving arms of a burrowed brittle-star, manganese-encrusted dolphin teeth, the remains of a jettisoned crate of Manilla-envelope clasps, zeolite crystals, pillows of basalt, calcareous shells of pteropods, the sinister egg-casings of skates, the broken anti-matter locks from a crashed spaceship, the short-crested ripples of sand and the scour moats forming in globigerina ooze.

JOY! PRAISE!

a festschrift for **Jerome Rothenberg**
on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday

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Rimbaud My Virgil

I.

Rimbaud escorted me many times through Hell and back again, something he was not able to do for himself in the end. My first Season in Hell was without his company, and emphasized the need for such a guide. During National Service an anxiety condition was mistaken for incipient schizophrenia and I was incarcerated in a mental hospital where I was tortured into convulsions and coma by insulin shock treatment. The idea was to inject enough insulin to draw all the sugar out of your blood until you were nearly dead, then bring you back with another injection. I had many visions and other experiences in the insulin coma, but I had no scheme or net to catch them in, or mentor who knew the way, so for a long time I lost the quality and significance of these journeys. I learned however that there was another world, which was this one deepened on the way to death, and that it was possible to pass through its jaws, and return.

A second season came when I had drunk sufficient bad alcohol to produce at the last a reasonable likeness of the insulin coma. Again I saw many visions, but now there was a difference. I dreamed intact the entire text of the Norman Cameron "Saison en Enfer" with Keith Vaughan's amazing illustrations, in multimedia and synesthetic form. I woke screaming, but grateful because I had travelled this region "holding on to my eyes" with the help of the imagery of somebody who had been there before. I would rather have had many more such nightmares than run the gamut of the office jobs that followed University, but I had been (on the one view) far too disturbed, or (on another view) too far into visionary experience, to profit from the formal university instruction, and I left without a degree, which meant that I had to take many ad hoc jobs rather than stay in the academy where I now believe I could have worked profitably—it is after all a kind of asylum.

I had been a compliant child, not as precocious as Rimbaud, but near it, and my desire to please everybody had created that sort of false personality which easily entered the consumerist fantasy by acquiring wife, home and children, responsibilities I was entirely unsuited for. I read now "Les Poetes de Sept Ans" and wished I had growled much harder, and rebelled earlier, as Rimbaud did. Yet because of my nightmare I knew him to be somebody who spoke the truth: I knew that what, otherwise instructed, would have seemed to me perverse impulses were reality-communions when I travelled through Nature "heureux comme avec une femme" and had my first sexual experiences this way. I learned something too under his instruction of the "Comedie de la soif":—

> "Chansonnier, ta filleule
> C'est ma soif si folle,
> Hydre intime sans gueules
> Qui mine et desole. . . .
> J'aime autant, mieux, même,
> Pourrir dans l'étang,
> Sous l'affreuse crème,
> Près des bois flottants"
>
> (Singer, your god-child is my mad thirst, mouthless bosom-hydra who mops and mows and ravages. . . . I had as soon lie dumb and festering in the pond among the driftwood and beneath the horrible scum. . . .)

In fact the furrows of my husbandly mask were the protective whelks and ridges of a high-pressure chrysalis cooking. I found that during any office day I could deregulate my senses by taking a mere half-pint of beer twice or thrice and improvising my own versions of *Les Illuminations;* later on I preferred to do the whole thing on an empty stomach and take speed prescribed by an over-friendly doctor, finish my advertising copy by lunchtime, and spend the rest of the day brooding over the Rimbaudian look of the world the drugs and drink offered to me. I feared it was an artificial paradise, yet with careful and rational regulation in the spirit of Rimbaud it did give me things I could use; later on I found it was not merely artificial, since I was able to achieve it by natural means, mainly sex-magical, towards a daily sacramental vision. This is what I believe Rimbaud was working towards, and he must be counted as one of the exemplary masters and martyrs. He had not the benefit of his own guidance as I did (this does not make me Dante) and he could not visit himself like a time-traveller. He was probably unable to lift himself out of his last "Saison en Enfer," and the depression probably lasted the rest of his life. We mourn

and salute him. I will say later how I believe he could have found a companionship Verlaine could not offer.

My first marriage broke up, largely, I believe, because I was unable to compromise about my visionary life; (I acknowledge that women may not need to break through with such vehemence and violence, as the menstrual cycle can take them through all human modes, from visionary to domestic—sacramental and back again). The break-up was accelerated by meeting an ancient Rimbaud with white hair, a dream visionary and a rebel who was at the same time a world-class anthropologist and analyst, John Layard; who restored my job-eroded visionary faith and with his dictum "Depression is withheld knowledge" showed me again that the doors of Hell were revolving doors, and that the secret was to go the right way round, just as in the Northern hemisphere you must fly round a hurricane to the right. Dream analysis with Layard led directly to my book with Penelope Shuttle *(The Wise Wound)* on the menstrual cycle, the taboo on which is arguably the way the masculine non-menstruating spirit prevents women from achieving their own visionary riches by shutting them into a hell of disinformation and stealing the one half of their sexuality—the tabooed menstrual half. Seen in this light, Rimbaud's remarks in the "Lettre du Voyant" are not condescending: "This language will be of the soul, for the soul, and will include everything: perfumes, sounds, colors, thought grappling with thought. The poet would make precise the quality of the unknown arising in his time in the universal soul. . .When the eternal slavery of Women is destroyed, when she lives for herself and through herself, when man—up till now abominable—will have allowed her her freedom, she will be a poet as well. Woman will discover the unknown! Will her world of ideas differ from ours? She will discover strange things, unfathomable, repulsive, delightful: we will accept and understand them." I had the paramount good fortune to live and work with a woman who had undergone this mighty process of female liberation and who was a poet from the time she was a woman aged 14, and who wrote strange and vital novels which were a feminine replay of "Saison" and "Les Illuminations." And how like the "hysterization of the skin" of the French feminists, the exterior cunt of outer contact seen potentially as deep intimate and sensuous as the womb experiences of love, masturbation, menstruation, birth, is Rimbaud's program, though he may have underestimated the extent the women could be teachers, after the exile of the feminine during 2000 years of Christianity. Read Helene Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa"—would our Rimbaud not have written this had he been she? Such are the habitations for our visions. I wish Rimbaud had met the grandmother of one of them. She would have companioned him out of Hell. Here is a cento from these Rimbaudian feminists:

"A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity. This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful. Beauty will no longer be forbidden." Cixous. This is sheer Rimbaud sex-magic, called *jouissance.*

> "But *woman has sex organs just about everywhere.* She experiences pleasure almost everywhere. Even without speaking of the hysterization of her entire body, one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined. . . ." Irigaray.

> "Women's *jouissance* carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration. It is a kind of potlatch in the world of orgasms, a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure." Marks and de Courtivron.

II.

What Rimbaud was up against of course still remains. Alvarez called it "the gentility principle"; Freud had a formula for it: if you want to rid yourself of an uncomfortable reality, first sublimate or idealize it, then repress it; and the actors hold the mirror up to human nature by saying "No sex please, we're British." The plain fact is that the sacramental is erotic, true magic is a turn-on, and by magic we should mean "unwounded perception"—"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear. . .as it is, infinite." Rimbaud having opened himself by "de-schooling the senses" was perhaps choked by the pollutions of patriarchy. Many have been so afflicted, and fallen. Sylvia Plath, who by the measure of her creative energy suffered abominably from the repression we call PMS, could find no woman-information or solidarity in the 1960s academic and literary atmosphere of Freud, Graves and the rest, and ended up "believing nothing" just at the threshold of the feminist revolution. Nevertheless she hysterized the skin so that her inner and outer were one, and wrote poems of protest and rebellion which puzzle male commentators with their vehemence of feminine energies frustrated of their meaning. For me, she inspired because she was one of the few poets writing in England in the sixties who knew how much has to go into a poem before

it was a poem. She makes the quantum-jump through that revolving door into the palaces of hell the fires of which Blake said were "the enjoyments of genius," as Rimbaud does in *Les Illuminations*. You will have noticed that I have subtly deregulated the word "dérèglement" in Rimbaud's dictum because it has been misused by people who are not serious about the "Alchemie du Verbe" and are anxious for poets to dissipate their gifts merely, so that the editions can be closed early and become more manageable to the scholar.

"Dérèglement" does *not* mean dissipation. Anyway, it is "raisonné dérèglement." Rimbaud always designed that the poems he wrote would induct his readers into the same world from which the poems came. George Whalley says that Rimbaud's statement is the essence of poetic:. . .metaphor disorients the individual senses so that they excite and fertilize each other . . . . In this way Poetic establishes a novel interpretation of thought and feeling. . . . In Poetic, sight can be converted into sound and texture and even scent; single words can assume physical shape, contour, fibre; groups of words may take on meanings not implied by their grammatical relations; savor, aroma, cachet may be conveyed in texture and rhythm." This is *jouissance*, which "carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration . . . ." Such writing not only comes from actual experiences of jouissance but creates them also, after de-schooling. Rimbaud would have liked the way Virginia Woolf's Orlando fell in love: "These details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person. Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow in the space of three seconds; he did not know whether he had heard her, tasted her, seen her, or all three together." As Whalley also says: ". . .the appeal is not to any one sense but to an interinanimation of all the senses combined into a tactual impression of great power—a condition that psychologists call synesthesia. This may very well be a prime characteristic of all poetic perception, of the poetic sense of language, and perhaps of all our refined and developed sensory experience." The tantric version of this is that the senses may appear to be five (or seven or seventy-seven) when they perceive outwardly, but inwardly they are the one, all-embracing sense, which is mind as well . . . . So instead of saying "the point is to arrive at the unknown by the disordering of all the senses" let us cease to distort the message and say "The point is to arrive at the unknown by the rational de-schooling of the senses." It is in school that we are first systematically taught gentility. It is not so much that we must "make strange" as to be prepared to find life as strange as it is, and it is a function of gentility to conceal strangeness.

Which is to say that society needs its poets—people who know something other than the genteel so strongly that they are able to re-arouse even in the genteel the true self, which is never genteel. Gentility is a convenient way of behaving in ritual forms for superficial and necessary purposes. If there is only gentility it is as stifling as England is today. We need something else, clearly. And that can be the poetry of really-knowing what is beyond gentility.

This the poet must be a specialist in; if he does it by dissipation then he may expect his useful life to be shortened; alcoholism and writing are nearly synonymous, it seems, in America. But Auden said we must be fit, in case the Muse requires us to climb mountains. If we call ourselves Muse-poets we should know that this means express knowledge of the death and resurrection each month of the personality in tune with the moon, amplified in every household by the menstrual cycle of the woman; and if we are the woman. . .then we must have enough knowledge and companionship to avoid the fate of Sylvia Plath. If we open ourselves by yoga or meditation and or sexual practices to what is in here and out there, then we must expect experiences of comparable intensity—say of the fruition, death and rebirth of the year (as of the month) still felt in country districts, but a rhythm overpowered by the cities, as all these ancient but actual rhythms are. We should become technicians of the sacred and study not the abstract ramifications of physics, but the actuality of psychological and biological sciences, remembering of course that any psychology which neglects the inner experience of the woman—and they all do this—is suspect and almost derelict unless we can give our own personal and poetic testimony from actual experience; as Freud said "if you want to learn the truth about women, go to the poets" which may not have meant to him women poets, but it must always do so now. We must look for what is neglected in genteel life, for it is the stone that the builders rejected that became the cornerstone of the building. This means sex, and the metaphysics of sex; nor am I here counselling promiscuity, which is the stock genteel mistranslation, as in this alchemy one can only progress through long practical study with one's Soror or Frater Alchymica. We must study our dreams; the visions of the night that show us so directly that "I is someone else" are neglected too so must be studied. Sex, a language adequate to express its intensity with its camaraderie an erotic vision of the world—this is the vocation Rimbaud calls us to; we can share his adventure and take it further than he did. The world has moved forward enough for the urgency of the Lettre du Voyant to become directly intelligible even environmental—I paraphrase—"The first study for a poet is self-knowledge complete. . . I say that one must be a seer, make oneself a seer. . .by a long, prodigious, and rational de-schooling of all the senses. . .to search

oneself and consume all the poisons in oneself. . . faith and superhuman strength is needed. . . .for the poet arrives at the unknown. . .is responsible for humanity, even for the animals; must see to it that poetic inventions can be smelt, felt, heard. . .A language has to be found. . . the time of the universal language will come. . .of the soul, for the soul, containing everything, smells, sounds, colors. . . The poet would discover and name the amount of the unknown awakening in the collective unconscious at any time so that it need not catch the world unawares. . ." For "poet" read "everyperson" or "Pilgrim" for there is nobody who is exempt from this Work.

—PETER REDGROVE

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The quotations from Cixous, Irigaray, Marks and de Courtivron come from *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* Edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Harrister 1981).

The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader. Amiri Baraka. William J. Harris, ed. Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991. $14.95

It would have seemed nearly criminal, but in the vastly more painful crimes committed by the few world citizens in positions of commanding wealth and power, it went unnoticed by all but a few poetry readers. For years virtually nothing of Baraka's was available in print. One of the prolific writers of the post Second World War period—poetry, drama, music criticism, political analysis. Oddly, of the little of his work that remained in print throughout, it is his music criticism, the two early books *Blues People* and *Black Music* that stayed around. Given that Baraka's outspoken political stance—unkind to liberals and conservatives, white and black middle classes alike—has dropped him from the big book review outlets, and let his books vanish from the public eye—one might expect the comparatively harmless genre of music criticism to be what the queasy would remember him by. Yet, it is nonetheless strange that this material should remain palatable—because for Baraka, "the Music" is that single most revolutionary and articulate African American statement. His *Autobi-*

ography (among the many books now out of print) makes clear the role "the Music" played in bringing him home to whatever social consciousness he's arrived at.

But in an age when music has largely lost out to commerce, the music Baraka writes about has gone into far margins. Everyone knows who Miles Davis was, but how many listen to Cecil Taylor, even after the committee awarded him a MacArthur?

So—finally a big volume of Baraka, almost 500 pages, issued by Thunder's Mouth Press. A quick glance shows it can't replace the books from which it draws—*Black Magic Poetry, Home: Social Essays, Daggers and Javelins*—but it does provide a sweeping account of Baraka's development. His is a life that disturbs many, while looking indisputably honest to a few. It is a life marked by major ideological developments which ferociously alter the writing—from year to year, decade to decade. William J. Harris, who edits the *Reader*, has hit upon an organization for the volume that tries to name certain stages, and thus clarify, where Baraka's been and where he's likely to go.

Briefly, the four sections go like this:

The Beat Period (1957-1962)
The Transitional Period (1963-1965)
The Black Nationalist Period (1965-1974)
The Third World Marxist Period (1974-)

These divisions make sense, are in no manner mere simplistic contrivances. The editing—Harris's—was done in dialogue with Baraka, so presumably these divisions conform to some notion the poet himself holds. Baraka has been clear from the early sixties that he lives, thinks and acts in dialogue with the revolutionary stratagems his times uncover. This makes him one of the more politically volatile among contemporary poets. His changes, tough as they have been on some readers, are never quixotic—they result from intense inward questionings inseparable from political experimentation. The move from LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka. The move from:

> Who has ever stopped to think of the divinity of Lamont
> Cranston?
> (Only Jack Kerouac, that I know of: & me.
> The rest of you probably had on WCBS and Kate Smith,
> Or something equally unattractive.)

to:

Trane was the spirit of the '60s
He was Malcolm X in New Super Bop Fire
Baaahhhhh
Wheeeeeee. . .Black Art! ! !

which left most of the critics behind, as well as a lot of the poets, was a calculated move. The man had altered his notion of who and what he was writing for.

As political understanding shifts to accommodate itself to changed social circumstances, the writer moves, dismantling bridges behind in order to improvise others ahead. Let me quote from "Home," the introductory essay to *Home: Social Essays.*

> "But my tendency, body and mind, is to make it. To get there, from anywhere, going wherever, always. By the time this book appears, I will be even blacker."

This was 1965. He could feel the changes Black Americans were provoking, the furies Malcolm X's life and death were unleashing, could feel they wouldn't let up. "Home" is one of the numerous essays I wish had been collected in the *Reader*—but there are many invaluable essays left out because the man's written so many. And Baraka's own "Preface to the Reader," forceful yet modest, articulates this commitment to change, as political consciousness develops and social crises stand (Olson would've said it this way) better revealed.

"This Reader should give some further description of my own changing and diverse motion, of where I been and why, and how I got to where I was when I next 'appeared' or was heard from. In the literary sense, it has always been somewhat difficult to 'appear' or be heard from—some times more difficult than others. . . In the last decade, it has been exceptionally difficult. . ." Again: "My writings reflect my own growth and expansion, and at the same time the society in which I have existed throughout this longish confrontation. Whether it is politics, music, literature, or the origin of language, there is a historical time/place/condition reference that will always try to explain exactly why I was saying both how and for what."

So, the sweep of change, often far from the public eye—by choices his own, or decisions handed down by the various publishers entrusted with his writings. Not, as he knows, that he ever really "appeared" or otherwise—rather the inner crucible of his thought often seemed fitful to fellow travelers left in some previous phase. Best place I know to get his word on the travels directly is the *Autobiography* of 1984, which shows Baraka's dexterity, his ability to dissect his own past, his self-deceptions, his mistakes. Not cruelly, ever, but with cold-eyed precision. Especially the tough stance towards women he and fellow activists held during the Black

Nationalist period, or the occasional woeful anti-semitism that crept into his writings— both of them tendencies he can look back on, not remorsefully, but pinning his own imprecisions with a critical eye. The *Reader* reprints two chapters from the *Autobiography*, placed as he wrote them in the "Third World Marxist Period." They are enough to demonstrate just how much is missing from print.

Little epigraphs from Baraka's writings set off each section; these along with Harris's unobtrusive comments on each entry give a pretty clear idea where the pieces fit into Baraka's trajectory. Plays, music and literary criticism, political dissections, fits of polemic, and of course—poetry. A pretty representative volume, though I'd have asked for more poetry since that seems to be the hardest of Baraka's writing to chase down these days. Also unfortunate—none of the substantial poetry volumes are included intact, so you don't get a sense of how Baraka himself put together his books. And there's only twelve pages of new and unpublished poetry—the previous selection dates back eight years—to 1983. Which means about a page and a half to represent each of these consequential and politically moribund years. This is somewhat balanced by two fine essays, a eulogy for James Baldwin, in which Baraka makes peace with a target for youthful venom, and a hard angry look at the Jesse Jackson phenomenon.

I hope this book brings Baraka enough back to the public eye that his ongoing writings manage to "appear." Remember—this *Reader* does not come to you courtesy of the corporate publishing houses. And this is a man whose thinking, in poetry and in essays, keeps step with the times—sweet in person, in his writings he's never out to make friends. Reading his *Autobiography*, reading in the wake of the Gulf War and the IBBC fiasco the social essays of previous decades, one gets a sound both forceful and at the same time slightly quaint or outmoded in tone. Especially the doctrinaire Marxist class analyses which seem painfully archaic. It's clear in 1991 that the old class struggles no longer pit something like an ownership class against the exploited classes. These days there's only a few folk sitting at the top, they hide themselves with wizard technologies, only their decisions become visible—ruthless decisions. Everyone is cannon fodder to them. Even the vice president of whatever, who brings home a six figure salary, is just to be toyed with. Who are these people?

"The Supreme Court is now peopled largely with 'ugs' wearing cellophane klan lids. Since the deaths of Malcolm, Martin, and the brothers Kennedy, the U.S. has been in the slowly tightening grip of would be creators of the new international corporate state. What we have struggled for they have attacked, undermined, ridiculed. . . ." This says it for all of us, African-, Hispanic-, Euro-, Asian-, or Native American.

From Baraka's sequence of historical poems *Why's/Wise*, which begins in the fearsome African American past, comes a musical intelligence pretty

accurate to the dilemma of any citizen, living or dying on our planet right now:

Wise I

If you ever find
yourself, some where
lost and surrounded
by enemies
who wont let you
speak your own language
who destroy your status
& instruments, who ban
your omm bomm ba boom
then you are in trouble
deep trouble
they ban your
oom boom ba boom
you in deep deep
trouble

humph!

probably take you several hundred years
to get
out!

—ANDREW SCHELLING

A Note On *Kenneth Rexroth & James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, Edited by Lee Bartlett, Norton, 1991, $27.50

Once upon a time, publishers ran a writer on his/her merits and not on knee-jerk reviewer or market reactions. In that time, certain writers—those ultimately driven, I guess, by a need to create context—ventured to advise

their publisher more or less energetically on their "directions." Sometimes, for very short periods, market could be overcome altogether. At such times only, the publisher could be said to have "direction." Exasperation would usually emerge on both sides: writer feeling that publisher was not doing enough fast enough; publisher convinced writer's picture was too narrow ignoring both balance sheets and the technical demands of production and marketing schedules. I know from experience that the conflict is insoluble: it still interests me as human drama. Comparatively, the companion volume on Williams (edited by Hugh Witemeyer) shows WCW as far more cautious and courteous, advancing a few downright friends but no program, yet far more severely self-serving when prompted than KR ever is.

I regret Laughlin's modesty required this collection to be virtually one-sided since we know a fair amount about Rexroth (especially with Linda Hamalian's concurrent Biography), much less about Laughlin. Here, KR, somber under the sense that JL does not appreciate him and his erudition sufficiently and is *ashamed* of him, hammers JL over and over for being a lackey of the East Coast establishment: academic, rich, superficial, treacherous, usually gay, wedded to *Partisan* and *Kenyon Reviews* and probably ex-Stalinist into the bargain. For KR, JL's material circumstances would ally him to this establishment. The attacks on "New Directions" for being, in essence, "No Directions" are interminable, often obsessive (a *few*: 88, 103, 106, 112-3, 119, 125, 137, 166, 174, 238, 241). JL, on *this* evidence, avoids replying or replies mildly. Once or twice he is very depressed; once or twice only replies in kind (41, 93, 99, 105, 120, 123, 141, 171, 193, 227).

There are tantalizing glimpses of JL's life. As a "lost" poet: "the only rational thing to do is to secede from the whole thankless effort," (18); his depressions as a publisher, e.g. when Random House takes over Williams (171); his imitations of his mentor's vulgarity (30, 67) and often foul-mouthed bad taste (117)—KR being, after all, JL's successor to Pound as teacher—as well as of his mentor's opinions, e.g. on Black Mountain (147), on the end of Western Civilization (237). On *this* evidence JL's praise of KR is neither timely nor adequate (160, 218, 247-8) and ND's slowness (talk of Selected/Collected *nine* years before the fact: 221) and incomprehension (initial failure to appreciate the translations or the autobiography: 229-30) also come through (Clark's biography of Olson corroborates the frequency with which ND was rejecting that "monster" from the first). Indeed, for every avant-garde step ND was taking, *ab initio*, it was also stepping backward from KR's point of view.

There are a few downright strange revelations, such as JL's view that, with more meticulousness, KR would have made a publisher (100). Rarely, again on this evidence, does JL sufficiently explain/defend the publisher's point of view and, of course, it could have been wasted breath. Sometimes, we are left crucially uninformed: what, e.g., might have been JL's list for a U.S. anthology, compared with KR's? (150).

On the KR side, much is touching: e.g. read him deploring his "abyss of bitterness" and fear of it (46). His own ongoing problems are best expressed in the tirade against Eberhart on 187-8. The erratic brilliance of the autodidact, electrically opinionated without benefit of consensual culture (it can often collapse spectacularly as in some individual judgements (169) or in his tirade against France (133-5) shines throughout the volume and he is cast-iron on the establishment's sheer ignorance (209, 223) and the "enemies of literature." He often seems to sell himself short, then rejects a very handsome offer from Hearst (232). His published versus unpublished views on particular authors most frequently contrast greatly but argue much public responsibility *vis à vis* the Republic of Letters. More generally, he predicts a rise in religious enthusiasm *à la* Blake (69) but distrusts most of its New Age manifestations (54). He also predicts/analyses the coming MFA industry: the problem with younger poets is that "so many have cut themselves off from all real experience in the universities," (152). His macho stances are disastrous (32, 55); same with his homophobia (e.g. 168). He experiences very mixed emotions on the rise of liberation poetries and multiculturalism (198-201), though his prevailing philosemitism (with lapses every now and again: the whole Oppen business is *weird*, 44, 53) contrasts agreeably with the average in his period.

Above all, what strikes me is his relentless bitterness against these States: "No society has ever treated its worst criminals like this one treats its artists," (35); a country "turned into the Inferno of organized irresponsibility," (64); a country which "does not really exist. . .a monstrous superproduction called 'After Hours'," (163); "the U.S.A. has become a land of horror," (254). See him also on the Kennedy myth (245-6) and his crowning stab at ND: "18 of the ranking US poets of the XXth Century committed suicide," (167). All this, of course, in a perpetual war-time context which predicts the end of modern civilization *tout court* (22) and the end of all culture (36). Without contradicting him perhaps it is here where he most reveals his profound sadness at being more "famed" than truly acknowledged and respected throughout his life.

Given what else we already have on KR, many readers will see the most valuable part of the book in Lee Bartlett's editing which is enormously thorough throughout (sometimes too much so—does the book's public really need to be told who Marx and Lenin are?— on the other hand this may be Norton's reaction to the spread of generalized illiteracy). In addition to a slew of little mini-articles of considerable use (e.g. 48) what emerges from the notes is a virtual history of ND and this, with both successes and skeletons in the closet, we greatly need for an understanding of our time.

—NATHANIEL TARN

The Disappearing Pheasant

In late October, 1991, Luigi Ballerini organized a gala festival of contemporary Italian poets at New York University's Casa Italian Zerilli-Marimo. A dozen poets from all over Italy were flown to New York for the event. After each set of readings, several American participants responded to what they had heard. Among the Italians reading were Edoardo Cacciatore, Elio Pagliarani, Marcello Frixione, Biagio Cepollaro, Amelia Rosselli, Giancarlo Majorino, and Alfredo Giuliani. (Unfortunately, several other poets canceled at the last minute.) The Americans included Marjorie Perloff, Douglas Messerli, Bruce Andrews, Jerome Rothenberg, Lyn Hejinian, Jackson Mac Low, P. Adams Sitney, Leonard Schwartz, Jonas Mekas, Rebecca West, Barbara Guest, Ed Foster, and Angus Fletcher.

The main text for the festival was a 650-page issue of *Forum Italicum*, edited by Ballerini and entitled *Shearsmen of Sorts: Italian Poetry 1975-1993*. The anthology, just published, includes translations of 19 poets, plus informative essays and reviews and useful bio-bibliographic notes. This publication served as an essential introduction to the context and concerns of the Italian poets, most of whom seemed uninterested in presenting or discussing their poetics at the conference. For the most part, the poets at "The Disappearing Pheasant" identified themselves in relation to the avant-garde. Indeed, a major subject in the *Shearsmen* anthology is the legacy of I Novissimi, the now-older generation of "neo-avant-garde" Italian poets that included, in addition to Giuliani and Pagliarani, Nanni Balestrini, Antonio Porta, and Edoardo Sanguineti. (Sun & Moon Press plans to issue the first English translation of the 1961 *I Novissimi* anthology.) In this context, Mac Low read a beautifully considered essay on why he doesn't like the term avant-garde. Given the reluctance of most of the Italians to engage in public dialogue, it was perhaps not so surprising that the only person to pick up on his comments was Barbara Guest, who averred that she rather liked the term, despite its problems.

In one of the breaks, Allen Mandelbaum remarked that Italians go to events like this symposium the way Catholics go to mass—with reverence. In contrast, many of the Americans seemed more interested in raising questions and giving their initial reactions, based on their own poetry contexts, to works and theories about which they were often quite unfamiliar. The difference made for some awkwardness but also for the beginning of some possibly substantial exchanges in the future.

Like many of the Americans at the event, I don't "have" Italian (I'm not sure I have English), so my experience of the poetry and poetics was continuously mediated through translations, including the UN-style simultaneous translations provided by Michael Moore and Carla Billiteri. By the end of the weekend, though, it became apparent that the real distance

between us was not lexical but cultural and that understanding each other's words or phrases only could go a limited way toward helping us understand each other's meanings.

The two poets I found most intensely interesting were Amelia Rosselli and Biagio Cepollaro. Roselli—a contemporary of I Novissimi—seemed to be working in a decentered yet explosively personal lyric form that suggested many parallels with the "New American" poetry. The two younger poets present were Cepollaro and Marcello Frixione. But while Frixione delighted the audience with facile and flippantly sexist lyrics about nymphs, Cepollaro tried to combine several different poetic and nonpoetic modes into a bravura performance piece. Cepollaro and Frixione were presented as the newest movement—Gruppo 93—but Cepollaro, who is an editor of the magazine *Baldus*, was careful to distance himself from the claims made by critic Fillipo Bettini for this group.

I was asked to respond to Sanguineti and to Nanni Cagnone, as well as to an essay on Emilio Villa, a statement on the formation of Gruppo 93 by Bettini, as well as to Frixione's reading. It was a disappointment that neither Sanguineti nor Cagnone made it to New York, since their work and the statements they prepared for the festival would have facilitated a deeper understanding of the contemporary Italian scene. My response went something like this:

Sanguineti had planned to read an essay entitled "Ideology and Language," a work that confronts us with a classic statement of the seemingly unbridgeable gaps between poetry and politics: yet it is a pointed irony that his still-relevant statement was first published 25 years ago.

In its two parts, Sanguineti's "Ideology and Language" suggests the double bind of new and innovative art movements. Sanguineti initially focuses on what he calls "the heroic-pathetic moment"—in which the value of a poem is defined by its resistance to commodification, that is, by its lack of marketability. Here Sanguineti contrasts the desire of poets to articulate a space outside the realm of administered culture with the socio-political reality that all spaces, including aesthetic spaces, are very much inside the literally insidious cradle of culture. Sanguineti's "heroic-pathetic moment" turns out to be none other than the desocialized, idealizing, rapture of Romantic Ideology and is perhaps a close cousin to that "noetic" space so often referred to in the discourse surrounding the New Italian Poetry. For implicit in the idea of the noetic is that mental, or, for that matter, imaginal spaces, can somehow transcend or be disconnected from material, social and even experiential spaces.

Sanguineti goes on to urge his readers to "resist the museum," that is, the institutionalization of poetry. From an American perspective, the danger of our innovative poetries becoming institutionalized is perhaps

less pressing than in Italy since our own alternative traditions of innovative poetries, from Stein and the Objectivists through Mac Low and beyond *have* evaded the museum (we tend to talk about it now in terms of the canon), although less through a strategy of anti-canonization than as a result of the bureaucratic entrenchment of Official Verse Culture, which refuses to even recognize the existence of innovative poetics, rejecting avant-garde and experimental tendencies not in the name of a European conception of "high art" but rather with a militant insistence on an anti-aesthetic self/voice-centered "suburban" realism.

Reading, as in a crash course, through the maze of movements and neo-movements, groups and trans-groups, that mark a newcomer's experience of the critical maps of postwar Italian poetry, I can't help thinking that avant-garde groupings are themselves commodifying and institutionalizing strategies—or I imagine that's one way to read Sanguineti's intervention here.

Currently, the problems of group affiliation pose as much a problem for poetry as do neolyric assertions of the Individual Voice. If poems can't speak directly for an author, neither can they speak directly for a group. Just as a poetry may wish to question the authorial voice, it also may wish to question all forms of group affiliation—national, state, linguistic, ethnic, and, indeed, aesthetic. Each poem speaks not only many voices but also many groups and poetry can investigate the construction of these *provisional* entities in and through and by language.

To speak in the "we" has no more priority in poetry than to speak in the "I." I missed this dimension of doubt in Filippo Bettini's simulated manifesto for Gruppo 93 (in *Shearsmen*). Like Sanguineti, but two decades later, Bettini begins with a quotation from Walter Benjamin, in order to fix Gruppo 93 in the neo-avant-garde tradition of "materialist writing." At pains to outline the "official" birth of Gruppo 93 in 1989, Bettini seems concerned neither with the negative dialectics of group formation nor with the heroic-pathetic dangers suggested by Sanguineti's ironic replaying of early sixties' poetry politics.

Many of the ideas in Bettini's manifesto will seem both familiar and welcome to those conscious of the remarkable work of one of Italy's greatest poets, Emilio Villa (a sort of Italian Jackson Mac Low), and the tradition on grammatologic and anti-lyric poetry of which he is emblematic. (The best representation in English of this remarkable writer, born in 1914, can be found in *The Waters of Casablanca*, a special issue of *Chelsea* [#37, 1978] edited by Ballerini, featuring translations by Richard Milazzo and Faust Pauluzzi.) Despite its claims to brand newness, Bettini's program will seem roughly analogous to that of a number of North American poets who, from the mid-1970s on, have advocated a non-"I"-centered poetry that foregrounds the material constructedness of language. In his Gruppo 93

manifesto, Bettini advocates many of the most prominent features of a range of English-language poetry over the past two decades: poems in which multiple poetic and nonpoetic discourses are enfolded, including dialectics and idiolects, the use of both new and traditional forms, and, especially, a pervasive and marked citationality (the use of quotes and found textual elements). This new poetic space represents a dialogically and dialectically self-conscious acknowledgment of poetic artifice that differentiates itself from what Bettini calls vitalistic and I would add hermetic and spiritualist approaches to formal innovation. Bettini's interest in what he calls "collective authorship" echoes the great interest in the American context, over the past 30 years, with collaborative poems.

The Italian use of dialect cannot be equated with American interests in ordinary language or vernacular. Ballerini's most recent book is a tour-de-force translation of Cavalcanti into Milanese dialect; how different from Zukofsky's translation of Cavalcanti's most famous poem into Brooklynese! Dialects can be used to contradict the literary models of the past; but they can also be used to impart a pseudoauthenticity to group language. Idiolect is more interesting to me: the creating of imaginary or constructed syntaxes, creating "hypothetical worlds" (to quote Aldo Tagliaferri on Villa).

I also wonder about the dangers of mere coyness, of a sort of shallow indicating as in simulationist visual artworks, in adopting, as Bettini notes of some of these poets, "the topoi" of late medieval troubadour lyrics: I fear, that is, that work like Frixione's is a retreat from the intensity and complexity of the work of Emilio Villa or Nanni Cagnone, whose *What's Hecuba to Him or He to Hecuba?* (tr. David Verzoni; New York: Out of London Press, 1975) is an energetic chronicle of the potentialities of poetic innovations.

Bettini notes the importance of the 1989 anthology *Poesia italiana della contraddizione* and I share his interest in if not just contra-diction, multiple dictions. Yet the content of his manifesto is contradicted by its rhetoric of authority, declamation, self-assurance and micro-management of literary history. Moreover, in at least one significant way the Contradiction anthology is more a continuation of the diction of Italian poetry than a change. As Manuela Bertone notes in her review in *Shearsmen*, only 3 of 43 poets in that anthology of the new pluri-linguality are women, a state of affairs mirrored both in Larry Smith's 1980 University of California Press anthology of Italian poetry as well as in both the new *Shearsmen* anthology from *Forum Italicum* and this conference, where Amelia Rosselli is the only woman represented. An eloquent consideration of just what is going on here is to be found in an essay in *Shearsmen* on Amelia Rosselli by Lucia Re called "Poetry and Madness" as well as in Re's related presentation at the conference.

The social grounding of poetry, as perhaps Sanguineti means to remind us, cannot be evaded by recourse to a "noetic"—or purely intellectual—materiality of language since the materiality of language is in the first instance a social materiality and, at the same time, a materiality not of selves and identities but of bodies, including gendered bodies. Materiality, that is, is not just an idea but also a responsibility. Here I very much agree with Cagnone's insistence, in his essay, that poetics not be pre-scriptive but, if to make the distinction at all, post-scriptive: "Poetry is action above and beyond what a person is able to think." So that my own poetic ethics, again to echo Cagnone, is to enact language's refusal to abandon the world but also to articulate the way the world cleaves to language.

But saying that, I also want to register my fascination, even intoxication, with the wild abstraction of some of the new Italian poetizing in prose. This "wireless prose"—to use Jerome Rothenberg's description at the conference—can seem like a surrealistic literary theory; what's especially interesting is that the abstraction is not metaphysical but ontological. That may explain why there have been several recent translations of Stein into Italian, including a full-scale critical edition by Ballerini and a translation of *Tender Buttons* by Milli Graffi, a remarkable Milan poet who has also translated Lewis Carroll.

Cagnone's "See Figure" in *What's Hecuba to Him* is a marvelous instance of contemporary Italian wireless prose. As Cagnone writes in "Out and Down," in *Hecuba*, "The poet feels poetry" like the invalid veteran "feels the phantom limb." So I want to end with a phantom, which is to say homophonic, rendition of two paragraphs of "See Figure" (p. 110):

speech divents the condition Della me a present, a
sow guard O verse ill telos, ma, verso the *originale*,
chow, say—see—propagate a intransitive, distance Nancy
toggles solo ill cantata Sue toggles, parla D.C. come'd
in a form of protection

guard an "O" in *centro divento* I lose no me in tandem say I'll
centro a natural man to vote, O O me speech O! lo!
desired passeth a cool Louis say non-perjured I'll deteriorate
leg o' Nelly, Sue, mescal and perch, dove I'll
snare, oh, renounce I a lot, vouch, I'll pass odor I'll name
hypothesis not finger

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Peripheral Commentary on Gene Frumkin's Masterwork, *Comma in the Ear*, 15 titles, 139 pages, Living Batch Press.

I want to write it clear that I consider Gene Frumkin's *Comma in the Ear* a masterwork. Here is Robert Creeley speaking of it. "Our time becomes a complex recollection of bits and pieces we had thought to constitute our histories and the hopeful proposal of our human significance we have attempted. This consummate masterwork is an acknowledgment and use of all these testifying echoes, locked in turn with the things our adamantly common world cannot find a place to put down. . . .The voices of these extraordinary poems make a place intensely present, irresolvable and yet endlessly insistent."

Can only read brief units, heart pounding from riches of text. Yet *Comma* deflects your admiration rejecting easy resolutions into applause.

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The cutting is where to look in all this object handling. The cutting is the make and the mate. I have never read a better cut garment than these *Comma* extra-large poems. No such thing as non-figurative, always person or dwelling or together—cuttings and patterns. Still hand drawn. We play Traubel to Frumkin's Whitman—relieving him of his burden of thought, his season or merchandise. I told GF face to face that I had read no finer work than this. He disagreed.

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Saying make "nothing" so. Letters, words, pictographs are never fixed by allegory or ideology, or engraved breastplate or scholar-facade. Images and echoes grow.

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Text bathers: These poems reveal some fleshy analyzed bathers—the nudes are as in Lucien Freud; "bathers," the body visually vascular, the blueness showing as if the skin can hardly contain the flesh, which seems to have been circumcised. "Lucien Freud's basic pigment for flesh is Cremnitz white, an inordinately heavy pigment which contains twice as much lead oxide as flaky white. . . .It granulates and I think of the granules as atoms. As in Bacon, the brush leaves a signature akin to raw tissue." (Robert Hughes). Freud, the grandson of Sigmund, has an important presence beside Frumkin's text and texture. Bathers and sinks, tubs and pipes as in Brighton Baths, Saratoga or Bulgaria, a misted dreamlike reflecting in the tub, reading in the tub, the mirror steamed: hydrothermia. But in other spaces: Demut, Winslow Homer, Manet, Matisse, Jacob Lawrence. . . .

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The coins of *Comma*: Sharing Tokens from stranger's lives, coins sifting across centuries and persons, rubbed smooth and away. Cartoons on coins. The imagery of market drift, Vienna, Antwerp, a sense of business and fashion flux, (Macy's going bankrupt (1992). Frumkin for 14 years the Editor of *California Apparel News*, L. A. (1952-1966), and went from there to the University of New Mexico through admiration of poets among them John Logan. I worked in the garment district too. The coinage of ideas, the linkage of business and refugees and ransom. . . Imagine the Antwerp Yiddish Bourse of talk and diamonds. Frumkin's interrogator in many voices remains nearby the camp gates of Anus Mundi. The gas is there. The book begins with island night horizon waves and soundings, then counter-attacks such seductions—so both second and third voices are orchestrated. Then, "you write: *my mother smelled the gas / in the house, the house, you might remember,/ is in Venice on Ozone St.*," and the narrative letters begin, remembering the Destruction.

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Comma as Diasporist poem: Kitaj and Walter Benjamin. From the *First Diasporist Manifesto*, Kitaj, 1989. "Diasporist painting is unfolding commentary on its life-source, the contemplation of a transience, a Midrash (exposition, exegesis of non-literal meaning) in paint and somehow, collected, these Responsa or reactions to one's transient restlessness un-at-homeness, groundlessness. . .although my Diasporist paintings grow out of art, as for instance Cubism or Surrealism did, they owe their greatest debt to the terms and passions of my own life and growing sense of myself as a Diasporist Jew." Walter Benjamin and Kitaj: "Walter Benjamin was felt as Kitaj's soul brother." (Joe Shannon). Frumkin is soul brother to both.

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The sentences of *Comma* wrap themselves—completely contained—as in George Lakoff's conception that we cannot imagine anything uncontained. Like his admirations: Demuth, Kitaj, Matisse, or like Stuart Davis or Jacob Lawrence, Frumkin is a cartoonist. He never forgets that he is drawing. Stuart Davis said, "A drawing is the correct title of my work." There is a bit of *Maus* in some habits of *Comma*. Things are within lines, boundaries of lines. It was a characteristic of American Visual Arts not to give up the drawing superstructure regardless of pressure of decompositional aesthetics.

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Voice 2: distanced and general: these quasi-ideological definitions and banners about the indeterminate float out over an empty beach decoratively like sensual skywriting for some other time. And they are named "distanced" by wise Gene Frumkin and are distancing and suggest domestic crisis, the allure of lecture, or some "Big Bang" that always moves things further away.

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Something of Walter Benjamin's "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" strolls beside this metropolis voice.

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The stage set of *Comma* is as wondrous as Emily Dickinson's bedroom in Amherst—actors and actresses silhouette, a shadow play, with a touch of Chekhov in the weariness and overburden of thought. Frumkin is non-mysterious in stage direction. "The styles/voices used in this collection are the idiomatic narratives, indicated by italicization; the conventionally capitalized sentences referring to mostly distanced or general matters; and the more intimate sentences which begin, rigorously, with uncapitalized letters." Little does this suggest the huge hormonal-moon, drawing ideational and sexual flows.

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Batik writers might not be concerned with the "principal voice," but Frumkin's L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E is not imprinted as batik or mathematic system. . . The sibling competition to be principal voice is acute among the three types in *Comma*. Note the Northern Irish composer Michael Acorn on his work *Perichoreses*, "to destabilize the wind quintet by featuring one of the instruments as a principal voice. . . .Throughout this work the position of the oboe is constantly challenged; gradually its untethered musical lines become constrained and integrated within the ensemble." In *Comma* the competitiveness of voices for the attention of a comma-defended ear, a cutting ear, maintains unventable stress.

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Many ways to have breakfast: philosophy, history, texts and breakfast, to act out in your booth the dramas of your readings. Tunes of reading. I recall Leonid Pasternak's show at the Jewish Museum a few years ago—a room full of readers: his children including Boris, his wife, himself, reading text or piano score. Gene's first question as we sat in his favorite diner for breakfast was about my reading, the honey of the alpha-bet, the raisins of our punctuation, the *challa* of our French toast. The festive weave of *Comma* includes the braided breads—this is poetry with a table and chairs. It is Friday night, even as breakfast. Chronic panic crowds the ritual meal.

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Spiral relief as source of Frumkin montage: Hellenistic vases? "The mixing of figured motifs from different iconographical contexts is common, especially on the Plaketten vases popular in 3rd Century B. C., on which the sizes of the figures vary and the iconography is often incoherent," the result of industrialization of figurine and pottery making and its surpluses. (Beryl Bar-Sharrar in *The Choroplast's Art*). The rotating reel quality of Frumkin's montage suggests potter's wheel as well as moldmade handling and surpluses, an abundance of demythologized figures in transferable

application along loop of montage—or neck of vase. The poems are rotated, grown on a horizontal wheel.

:

No imagery without waves that curl above the little boat of word. *Aloha* and *Mahalo*, both resonating most with island good-bye. *Comma in the Ear* seems to have risen from translucency of the island weathers of Hawaii. That's my guess, having worked there myself for a while. Coming before *Comma* was *A Sweetness in the Air* (1987). The tradewinds and flora, the horizons and shapes of the volcanic islands magnetize and resonate in the waved imagery of the 1990 *Comma* text, and some of the poems of *Comma* were published in the *The Chaminade Review*. The 85 sections of *A Sweetness in the Air*, Frumkin's Hawaii-sensuous with scent and sea-scape—and a bit of Stevens in the air—filtered his blood and blows a strange painful sweetness through the pages of his masterwork before us. *Aloha* means "good-bye": navigation, sailing, waves and waving. The accidental seed carried by the dying bird or fish made the islands livable, aloha and diaspora

:

Moses, the stutterer, felt the comma of God, who feared the hero: God's comma made Moses stutter, comma turned him away, just allowed him to glimpse. Moses and the curses of Deuteronomy surge inside *Comma in the Ear*. Moses was cut away, "Let me go over and see the good land." Diaspora of one.

:

Frumkin is of the world of the three year old scholars—Yiddish was his first language. Knowledge weaves around him like figures made of Hebrew letters; it is not an arrogant metallic display, this house of study and bed of study.

Comma is steamy with knowledge and interpretation. Study is breathed in like cinnamon-tea among shelves of one's own hoard of books, or like a bowl of good soup, or perhaps with the orange of the bedlamp when you are intimate with the text. *Comma* has such tasty beauty. The Buddhist character "with heart" applies. Bed is for reading, recalling that his time is Friday night when the Shekhina comes and we savor her presence and conceive. Perhaps the woman who writes letters we intercept in *Comma* is the lost Goddess. I think of Kafka's mention of how love letters are eaten on the way by ghosts.

—MILTON KESSLER

Noticings

Image summoned by reading Robbe-Grillet's *Ghosts in the Mirror*: A copy of one of my books on desk in autumnal late-afternoon sun of an unreachable other time, as if this were an image from the life/memories of someone in the future who owns this book of a long dead author.

"I think one guy's sole duty was to load guns."
—George Rock, trumpet & vocals with Spike Jones' City Slickers

Soviet photographer Victoria Ivleva speaking of the last six men working in the wrecked Chernobyl reactor:
"You take your last breath and last glance at the trees. You climb the small, absolutely vertical staircase and rush as quickly as you can through the high-rem field into the deadly dark. The guys are my friends now and I look at them and think 'Oh God, I will soon see them in a coffin.' One likes to joke that he has already absorbed 'so much negative radiation beyond a normal lifetime that I should have died before Ivan the Terrible.' You've no time inside, every thought is a rem. When you get a dose in there you feel sleepy at first, and later you have this feeling of. . . I told the guys: 'You know what I'd like to do now? Go back inside.' And they said: 'Now you understand us.'"

I'm tending to forget what the nonverbal looks like.

"Hawk blows a magnificent Yesterdays which contains one of the most powerful reed squeaks ever recorded."
—John Chilton, *Song of the Hawk*

"I like you, however I'm afraid of your entertainment."
—Daniel Davidson, *Product*

Glenn Gould because: It's not him or Bach that I hear, but through him I begin to hear what Bach heard.

Possible to catch those things that only occur in the moments to which memory has no access?

"The second he sat down at the piano he sank into himself, I thought, he looked like an animal then, on closer inspection like a cripple, on even closer inspection like the sharpwitted, beautiful man that he was."
—Thomas Bernhard, *The Loser*

"But I am speaking of the first night, when I leave my apartment almost breathless, searching for someone to show the poem to. Often now there is no one. My fellow poets (those I showed poetry to ten years ago) are as little interested in my poetry as I am in theirs. We both compare the poems shown (unfavorably, of course) with the poems we were writing ten years ago when we could learn from each other. We are polite but it is as if we were trading snapshots of our children—old acquaintances who disapprove of each other's wives. Or were you more generous, Garcia Lorca?"

—Jack Spicer, *After Lorca*

"A great many actors don't know that the camera actually photographs thought."

—Dirk Bogarde, A*n Orderly Man*

"And each of them will open a door to one of the rooms hidden inside the images separating you from speech."

—John Yau, *Big Island Notebook 3*

"After roughly two months, Dr. Landy introduced the piano."

—Brian Wilson, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*

"deliverance of imprisoned light"

—Samuel Beckett, *Notes on Krapp's Last Tape*

"So one of these mornings he came by, went into my bathroom. It was about six months before Bird died. Pretty soon he calls out to me: 'Come in here, Max! I want to show you something.' I go in the bathroom and he's standing up looking in the mirror. His pants are down to his ankles, and his whole body is a swollen mess—his *hands* and everything. Bird's looking in the mirror at himself and he says: 'Man, I done wore this motherfucker out.' He was talking about his body like it was a *suit*. He didn't say it sadly. He was so lighthearted. That's the attitude you have if you believe in reincarnation. You simply shed this and take another one." Roach smiles. "Maybe he's got one someplace."

—Max Roach, L.A. Times Magazine, 15IX91

"But what scared me the most was when my father would put on the gasmask. His face would disappear. This was not my father any longer. This was not a human being at all."

—Philip K. Dick (in Sutin, *Divine Invasions)*

You know about the insomniac agnostic dyslexic? He lies awake all night wondering if there is a dog.

"Deeper than the ruins of concentration camps are worlds more frightening, worlds more meaningless. The hells of geology remain to be discovered."

—Robert Smithson, *Art Through the Camera's Eye*

"It's characteristic of a Russian novelist to reveal some lack of confidence
in the relationship between words and their things. . .
But this lack of confidence often culminates in a single instant of ignorance
And that instant, Arkadii said, might correspond to what you have called
paradise."

—Lyn Hejinian, *Oxota*

—CLARK COOLIDGE

MLA

It's a Depression. A student said to me, "At least it will give my generation a little character." A smarter one said, "Books are too slow." It was in evidence even at the San Francisco MLA, where chairpeople were standing around at the book exhibits, their money for new appointments dried up.

There were oodles of books at the exhibits—within the academic community the book is a badge, Purple Heart of tenure warfare, a status symbol even as the profession debates the means to "get the word out" beyond the academic community. But the biggest topic of conversation around the exhibits and in the hotel corridors was the homeless people around Union Square. Homeless with cats in bags, homeless with AIDS, homeless with three-year-olds. I was tapped out in no time.

Meanwhile the Teachers for a Democratic Culture are deciding how to fight a well-financed Right intent on mis-representing multiculturalism. State legislatures are cutting budgets, insisting on more teaching and less research. In the popular media professors are being skewered while they hide out working on the definitive tome on post-colonial theory. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the problem is access to popular media,

which really means the creation of an alternative popular media. But this will be difficult as long as we have the cult of the book.

***

At a panel honoring the 200th anniversary of Shelley's birth they were giving out buttons, the kind that you pin on to show yours support for Minnie Mouse or the local zoo:

SHELLEY:
POET AND LEGISLATOR
1792-1992

"POETS ARE. . ."

I sat and watched Michael Palmer's face as he listened to two professors spend thirty minutes cataloguing all of the events honoring Shelley this year. Before his frown completely swallowed the table, he was introduced to read some fragmentary meditations on Shelley and contemporary poetics, ending with a few bitter remarks about the Gulf War. Then Michael Davidson read a paper on Shelley's importance to various poets. Afterwards I overheard two senior Shelley scholars exclaiming that these were the best papers they had heard in years—on Shelley. Maybe they found Palmer and Davidson faithful to the spirit(s) of Shelley. But for me the real meaning of the event was to be found on Palmer's face: "Poets are buttons, and poets are buttoned."

***

Two panels I was not able to attend covered almost exactly the same topic: "Do We Still Talk About Poetry?" Or something like that. Actually, lately I've been a little encouraged by the criticism of poetry, even while it seems true that such criticism, like poetry itself, is becoming increasingly marginal in the institutions of literary study. *Critical Inquiry* has been publishing a number of good essays on the relationship of poetry and theory, theory and poetics. One of the things that seems to be happening there and elsewhere is that critics who are skeptical of the various formulations of strategic poetics associated with Language poetry are feeling the need to articulate positions at similar levels of abstraction and sophistication. See for example John Koethe's defense of neo-romanticism against both Language poetry and those workshop poets still tied to old notions of authenticity, or for that matter Charles Altieri's review of Marjorie Perloff in *Contemporary Literature* 32:4, which asserts that "it would be a severe loss if we confused the means with the end, the workings of mediation with the rewards of

expressive activity within and against the histories that work to form us in their image." It may be the case that an emerging critique of Language writing will be slow to take account of increasing differences among these poets, but anything that improves the conversation about poetics must be welcomed, whether that be Allen Grossman's *Summa Lyrica* (*Western Humanities Review*, Spring 1990) or Charles Bernstein's new prose, *A Poetics*, from Harvard University Press (of all places). Less happy news is that Peter Makin's book on Basil Bunting—Makin is as good a reader of poetry as there is—cost a fortune ($79.). Oxford must not expect many to buy it. Nathaniel Tarn has a collection of his essays out from New Mexico, and Marjorie Perloff's new book is due any day. The most recent issue of *Poetics Journal*, on "the person," contains much of interest, though for some reason nobody of the generation of New American writers seems to have been invited to contribute (there is a symposium on Creeley's work however).

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Rob Wilson, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991)

Wilson's genealogy of the sublime relates the surprising persistence of this genre in America (after its decline in Europe) to discourses of national empowerment, tracing with considerable care and breadth of knowledge the re-codings of the sublime from the natural sublime of Bradstreet and Livingston through the democratic sublime of Whitman to the "more technologically inspired euphorics and bliss-and-dread imageries pervading poets like Stevens, Crane, Ashbery, Ai, Ron Silliman, Adrienne Rich, and Bob Perelman." Wilson has much of interest to say about the ideological inflections of the sublime, which can "serve different genders and even opposed or self-contradictory political agendas." The concentration on the Americanization of the sublime distinguishes Wilson's book from many studies of the sublime published in the 1970s and 1980s; too often critics have read the American sublime within a trans-national and ahistorical oedipal narrative of intertextuality and originality, "strong interpretation" and "self-reliance." Wilson especially accuses Harold Bloom of de-historicizing the sublime, but he does make some use of Bloom's work on Emerson as well as most of the commentary on the sublime from Longinus and Kant to Lyotard and Derrida. Wilson locates Bloom's fathers—Emerson and Whitman—within a history that includes not only poetic predecessors such as Bradstreet, Livingston, and William Cullen Bryant but also the painters of American Luminism and Brigadier General Thomas Farrell, who

was obliged to represent the unrepresentable (the nuclear sublime) at Alomogordo in 1945. Whether the text at hand is Bradstreet's "rapt wit sublime" or Stevens' "The American Sublime," Wilson is at pains to demonstrate that the first task of the American sublime is to ratify America as *site* (geographical, social) of the sublime. Tocqueville and others are useful to Wilson in helping him link the puniness of democratic man with the sacralization of force in the nineteenth century American sublime and beyond. Stevens' modernist "de-creating" of the natural sublime and its romantic tropes first leads to a re-statement of the American sublime's "contradictory hold over the contemporary subject" in numinous words, and in art and architecture. After Hiroshima threatened "the supreme fiction," Stevens "turned back from Cold War agnostics to the Church of Rome for postnihilist direction." Wilson's postmodern sublime follows Jameson's in suggesting that what can be retained from earlier descriptions of the sublime (Burke's predominately) is "a relationship of the individual subject to some fitfully or only intermittently visible force which, enormous and systematized, reduces the individual to helplessness." Throughout the book Wilson reminds us of the costs of troping vastness into emptiness in the "Euramerican" genre. Stevens' poem responds to a statue of Andrew Jackson, no friend to the Native Americans who figure nowhere in any of the these poetries of national empowerment, whose terror and awe must look very different. But what worries Wilson the most is an uncritical acceptance of the sublime in a nuclear era. Two things which seem to have prompted Wilson's book are the big money "once-embarrassing landscapes of native sublimity" were fetching in the late 1970s (as Reagan emerged) and the continuing taste for a nostalgic sublimity in such unreconstructed poets of the indigenous natural sublime as Galway Kinnell.

Wilson's genealogical method forces him to rephrase key concepts from chapter to chapter, and this can be a little frustrating. But the methodology also allows him to trace the persistence of earlier versions of the American sublime, as in Stevens' occasional "transcendentalist nostalgia for the natural sublime." No doubt it would also be possible to trace in some post-modern critics and poets a nostalgia for Hart Crane's technological sublime; "I'm thinking of Marjorie Perloff's hymn to her word processor in the introduction to her book on Futurism. For Wilson—as for Derrida—what a nuclear sublime discloses in the last half of our century of the technological sublime is the "delusive *limit* of this challenge by the technocratic mentality to nature's forces, the danger of reducing knowing to an instrumentality of *techne.*" Postmodern poetry "must disclose the consequences of an American *techne.*" Finally, Wilson is writing on behalf of a "post-national" future which he is unable to imagine or theorize, and as a critic of a genre which he is not sure "should be wholly undone." He

writes with what seems an honest and useful skepticism about the ability of a postmodern sublime "to find new formations and affects commensurate with (if not resistant to) this space-age threshold of nuclear force." It might not have been too much to ask for some more extensive discussion of this supposed post-national future as it relates to recent (perhaps too recent for Wilson's book) developments in Europe as well as to the movement of international capital and Bush's New World Order. Wilson's somewhat vague and utopian hope in a post-national future seems to be propped up not by postmodernist theorists of capital and/or technology but by his notion that a postmodern sublime might emerge as a powerful and "collective attempt 'to think the unthinkable' (Derrida)" as a "*global* concept."

The book is valuable not only for its range but for its readings of specific appropriations of the sublime in Lyotard, Baudrillard, Perelman, Robert Pinsky and others. This will be an important book for students of American poetry as well as for critics and theorists of the nuclear sublime.

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Victoria Forde, *The Poetry of Basil Bunting* (Bloodaxe Books, 1991) Basil Bunting, *Uncollected Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1991)

Forde's book is an introduction to Bunting's life and work, and is most valuable for its inclusion of excepts from Bunting's letters to Zukofsky and to Forde herself as she came to know him in the last years of his life. Some of the biographical material is new, including an amusing anecdote about Ezra Pound baby-sitting Bunting's infant daughter Bourtai and feeding her whiskey. "She likes it!" said Ezra. Yikes! As a reader of Bunting's work Forde is not atypical in most regards. The odes are read largely as exercises in technique preparing Bunting for the more important longer poems, the sonatas. A single brief chapter suffices to cover them, with a few being singled out as interesting poems in their own right. While I admire the attention to evaluation, it is time the odes receive more serious attention. They're much better than Forde thinks. Also like most of Bunting's critics to date, Forde offers a relatively uncritical rehearsal of Bunting's own brief—and always strategic—remarks on poetics and the work of predecessors and contemporaries. While she is a decent reader of Bunting's poems considered as formal artifacts—she is alert to many of the means by which this most musical of modern poets achieves his effects—she has little of interest to say about the subject matter of Bunting's poems. This too is typical of Bunting's critics to date. It simply will not do to say that Bunting

is interested in the "theme of mortality." Death and male sexuality are obsessive concerns in Bunting's work; there's no getting around them as a "theme." Sexuality is not discussed at all in Forde's book, which forces her to ignore some of the more problematical passages in the odes and even in the earlier sonatas, such as the reference to the "cunnilingual law" in "The Well of Lycopolis." Perhaps she found some of the more rancorous early Bunting embarrassing, but there's no excuse for ignoring the issue in the more elegiac late Bunting.

There are really at least two Buntings, it seems to me (three if one counts the very first odes), and the transition between them has everything to do with Bunting's stay in Iran and can be witnessed in the uncertainties of "The Spoils." While I think I can guess why Sister Victoria Forde might choose to ignore issues of sexuality in Bunting—there *is* however an amusing photograph of Basil standing in front of advertisements for Desnudismo in Barcelona—I cannot guess why she refuses to address the question of belief. Is Bunting a Christian poet, as Donald Davie would have us read him? Or is he the agnostic Quaker others have found him to be? How seriously does he take the pantheism of Wordsworth, the anti-metaphysics of Lucretius? Perhaps the question should be rephrased: what has Bunting *become* when he moves back to Northumbria and writes the great late odes and *Briggflatts*?

It must be remembered, though, that Forde's book is an overview, an introduction to Bunting's work—it's amazing that it has taken this long for such a book to appear. And Forde has not backed away from some of the more difficult work required of such an introductory study, such as an investigation of the forms of the classical Persian poetry Bunting translated and adapted. The chapter on Bunting's Persian "overdrafts" is the book's best, the most useful commentary. Though for the time being—until we have a biography and an edition of Bunting's letters—Forde's study will remain well worth reading for other reasons as well.

If I were to introduce Bunting in such a way as to be responsive to those poets he learned something from beyond technique, something more than the "sleights" he learned from Horace and Malherbe, Wyatt and Pound, I would begin with Canto VII of Dante's *Inferno*, on the wrathful and the sullen, on acedia. Next would be Villon's *danse macabre*, and after that the various versions of melancholy discourse to be found in the Persian poets. There are many references to drunkenness in these last poets, who may have been following Aristotle's theory of humors in the *Problemata* (purportedly his), where melancholy, lust, and genius are linked, black bile and wine-froth. That is why I am hugely happy to have with the publication of the uncollected Bunting all the translations of Manuchehri, Hafiz, and Sa'di. Bunting is famous for having tossed out most of what would have been acceptable work to very good poets, and we're lucky that Richard

Caddel has found the few things he's collected in this volume. Besides the Persian overdrafts, there's a poem after Baudelaire's "Un Voyage à Cythère" and translations of Horace. There's "They Say Etna," the most didactic and Poundian of Bunting's longer poems, and an elegy for his son which was first published in *Sulfur* ("A Song for Rustam"). There are two beautiful strophes from the sonata Bunting began in 1972 but never finished. And there are other things too, many of them from Zukofsky's manuscript of *Caveat Emptor* (now in the Beinecke), a collection Bunting put together in 1935 only to have it rejected by Eliot and others. Not all of the work is first-rate, and one could write a book speculating about why it was eventually discarded by Bunting. Even so, the volume contains some of the best poetry to be published in recent years, and it is invaluable for students of Bunting. My one regret is that alternate versions of existing poems were not included. In the *Caveat Emptor* manuscript, for instance, there is an interesting version of the ode that Bunting eventually dedicated to Mina Loy. This still unpublished version might have helped Forde think about sexuality in Bunting, just as an examination of Bunting's letters to Ezra Pound would have helped her think about Bunting's politics (yet another subject almost completely ignored in her book).

It seems that the "Bunting push" is well under way. I hope to contribute a little to the effort myself.

***

Charles Bernstein, *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon Press, 1991)

Does anyone else think it a little weird that Bernstein is now a Sun & Moon *Classic*, that his most recent collection of poems includes a two-page biography at its end? One thing historians of the avant-garde have not always recognized is the entrepreneurial skill of oppositional poets. Another thing they have sometimes neglected is the speed with which poets associated with "movements" or "groups" move away from these once they have become established. Though it seems odd to say, *Rough Trades* is partly a retrospective book, one that includes two long poems called "Reading the Tree" (Silliman's anthology) together with—immediately after—a poem offering sardonic remarks on poetics to The Kootenay School of Writing in Vancouver. Just as in Ron Silliman's most recent book, *What*, where Silliman writes "To say / this has become a cliche. *I HATE SPEECH*," Bernstein in his "Reading the Tree: 1" skewers the phrase that once served as a manifesto for a community of writers: "'I hate / speech' & speech don't like me none too good / either." While Bernstein recognizes

that "I / could never have done it alone" and remains as interested in the social body as ever, I'm tempted to say that *Rough Trades* is Bernstein's most "personalized" book. It is certainly his most readable book. And, I might add, for me it is his best. It's only partly ironic when Bernstein writes "they used to be / the leaders of the avant-garde, but now / they just want to be understood." Consider, for example, this passage from the same poem:

> These
> are not my words but those that summer
> gives me, with a tenderness quite
> unknown in the real world, where
> there is little to remember but
> stormy days. I would have a house
> of my own, with a bay of pastel
> miasma, reality leaking
> from its edges, as the context
> conditions. Therefore, my style
> seems to have fallen to
> pieces, deteriorated
> in the three-year interim
> between books; others
> may write better-made poems
> but those poems with their elegant
> turns of phrase, their vivid
> excellence, often add up to nothing.
> Either poetry is real as, or realer than,
> life, or it is nothing, a stupid
> & stupefying occupation for zombies.
> For my poetry is informed by
> something inside that doesn't
> flinch & won't budge.

Though the first few lines of this read like Duncan or some other romantic poet, I am most reminded of Williams' "The Pink Locust," where the old man defended his idiosyncrasy in a propositional mode that represented something of a retreat from the more materialist poetics of his earlier experimental phase. There is much of the old Bernstein in *Rough Trades*—"fissures, breaks, and other disjunctive devices" (to quote the giant blurb)—but much of the book seems as interested in re-constructing lyric and discursive sense out of the fragmented social body (of which Byron, Stevens, Williams, Campion and other poetries are a part) as it is in disrupting or de-constructing the discursive and lyric conventions that have

reinforced dominant ideologies. In other words, this book contains not just acid but also a little stone. One poem even begins "We share these sediments, sentiments," though this does continue on to reject "the father's lore." But rejecting the old stories does not entail abandoning the pursuit of some new ones, just as (to quote Bunting) abstinence does not cure desire. Maybe I'm way off base here, but this explains for me the relative discursive continuity of the passage quoted above, and the re-writing of Stevens' imaginary in the volume's first poem, "The Kiwi Bird In The Kiwi Tree," and the appropriation of the beginning of Byron's "She Walks In Beauty" for what is in effect a conventional "compleynt" in "Verdi and Postmodernism." This last poem especially pleases me, as I am of the once familiar opinion that poetry atrophies when it moves too far from song:

> She walks in beauty like the swans
> that on a summer day do swarm
> & crawls as deftly as a spoon
> & spills & sprawls & booms.

Bring me Campion's lute! Now that Bernstein has demonstrated that he can outdo the mostly flaccid New Formalists at creating textures of sound (speech?), will the next move be to give over parody and comedy for lyrical effusion? Probably not.

—KEITH TUMA

Different Nostalgias

Eugène Nicole's second novel, *Les larmes de pierre* (Paris, Éditions François Bourin, 1991) is a sequel to *L'oeuvre des mers* (see Noticings, *Sulfur* 27). This work centers on the incursion of a world-historical event into the fictional microcosm of the island of Saint-Pierre: the landing of the first airplane and its immediate consequence, the arrival of Amanda Maple, the first tourist. While this event inaugurated a new epoch in the island's history (as well as a foundational moment in the narrator's autobiography) it also

created a modification of the delicate *mythos* so brilliantly proffered by *L'oeuvre des mers*. For the field of gravel on which the island's catch of cod once dried now serves to welcome a celestial, and no longer a maritime, arrival. For the silent, caring, yet foreign gaze of the first tourist was paralleled by the noisy, celestial trajectory of the first airplane; both created a new way of seeing, a new topographic orientation, a new source of forgetting. Yet the recollection, Proustian or otherwise, which guides our words, gestures, thoughts and emotions is always obliquely traversed by death. This process is here allegorized by the "Théâtre de la Morte": this childhood memorial to the lost mother is also a narrative double of the "Théâtre de l'Oeuvre-des-Mers" which gave its name and its memory to the first volume of this work. There is also the Café du Nord, that other quotidian theater of society. The destiny and myth of Saint-Pierre are ruled by several antithetical ironies, among which we discover the very absence of the sound of fishermen's boots on the floor of the café. This lack is a sign that an epoch is over: the island's history was previously marked by Death standing in for Neptune, for death is the work of the sea. The footsteps of those men whose worst fate was to be claimed by the sea were the antiphrastic, monumental, nostalgic doubles of the fishermen lucky enough to return and haunt the very same café. The dead always returned as memory; they returned as tears of stone, as the very tears of Saint-Pierre. The end of *Les larmes de pierre* indicates that this book must be the first of many sequels. For in the hand of a dead photographer of the isles—he who captured these very moments of transition, these very instants that articulate the narrative's fictive and real nostalgia—was found a letter addressed to the "Commander of the Dying," consisting only of the word "Excellence," without further predication. As one character exclaimed: "What elegance, to end on a comma! No final period!" A perfect destiny, indeed. Nicole's book—the manifestation of a collective memory that has now found its public voice—ends less morbidly, but no less suggestively, on the word "overseas. . ." This ellipsis bears a rich anamnesis still to be created.

*

Pendant la matière (Paris, P.O.L., 1991) is one of two books published by Valère Novarina last year. This solipsistic work, consisting of 616 aphorisms primarily on the theater, may serve as a "guide" to Novarina. But these pointers, while directing us toward his theatrical texts and productions, are, if anything, rather a means to misguide us, to reveal the distortions, mutations, rarities, and creative paths within the French language. Aphorism CCCXII provides the rationale for this book:

> Mouths of disquietude in the world, points of anguish, fields of unrest and scenes without end—books are fragments of a struggle, stars of disquietude, systems of incertitude, summonings of air, movements of emptiness, like nebulas of non-matter, tortured, turbulent, knots of negations, places where matter is questioned, turning beneath speech, turning in question.

Novarina's technique is a celebration of neologism, malapropism, metaplasm, verbigeration, parapraxis, and most other linguistic aberrations, especially those arising from the Rabelaisian, carnivalesque play of lived speech. Here, linguistic errors and anomalies bear as much creative weight as the presumed perfections of classic composition, in an oeuvre which represents contemporary French in its state of maximal mutation.

The last aphorism of *Pendant la matière*, "Always seek a hand swifter than the mind," could serve as the epigraph to Novarina's life work, as well as the appropriate segue to discuss his most recent play, *Je suis* (Paris, P.O.L., 1991), which premiered in Paris at the Théâtre de la Bastille in September 1991. This work is typical of Novarina's theater: it is non-representational, non-narrative, non-referential. Such is a theater of language—created for the ear rather than the eye or mind—where paralogisms, conundrums, aporia, and the sheer pleasures of linguistic nonsense organize the text. As Novarina explains in yet another aphorism, XXI: "The actor does not name, does not designate, but seeks to captivate. The actor is nobody and designates nothing. He summons what he does not name." At one point, the character Jean Singulier interrupts:

> Reruin the letters that come and go; I lack the generalized lacks of agreement as well as what follows in thought; I cast forth everywhere incomplete plurals and I gathered up faulty singulars, repetitions of adjectives, inversions of plurification and coordinations in an already quite broken state, not in upright French but in a backwards, reversed language. . .

Aphasia or poetry? The proper names are no less revelatory, as other characters include: Le Vivant Malgré Lui, Le Docteur de Vacuité, L'Illogicien, Sa Pensée, Le Mangeur de Soi-Même, La Figure Dans la Nuit, Johannes Abstractus, and many others. But it would be an error to present any given character or quotation as typical or emblematic: the gist of this work is that there is no gist whatsoever. This impossible theater—where everything is suggestive, nothing indicative—belies all standard hermeneutics, and demands a new theoretical vocabulary and sensibility. Novarina's own position vis-à-vis his treatment of theatrical language ("the theater of the

word") is expressed by the personage in *Je suis* who bears his own name, Valère. His only words are: "Explain yourself." This could be asked of nearly every character, of nearly every enunciation, in the book—yet explanation would, of course, be impossible. This is precisely the point at which the pleasures of listening begin.

*

If any single notion could be deemed the central trope of modernism, it would probably be that of *montage*. The most recent book of P. Adams Sitney (one of the leading historians of the American avant-garde cinema) considers the interdisciplinary effects of montage in modernist film and poetry, discussing such figures as Mallarmé, Stein, Blanchot, Olson, Eisenstein, Brakhage, Landow and others. *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1990), examines what Sitney terms the "antinomy of vision," the fact that while modernist cinema and literature stress the privilege of vision, they all the while create a dense, complex visual opacity. What follows attempts to recuperate a Classic and Romantic heritage as the effective origins of modernism: we discover Greek mythology in Mallarmé, the Bible in Blanchot, and Emerson in Stein, in Olson, in Brakhage. It is precisely in Sitney's treatment of the modernist appropriation of Emerson that the book's narrowness is most apparent. One of the key figures in the Emersonian tradition as well as one of the most radical practitioners of "modernist montage" is John Cage, curiously absent from *Modernist Montage*. Sitney himself insisted, in a 1977 debate with Malcolm LeGrice at the Millennium Film Workshop, that consideration of Emerson is necessary to understand Cage. A devout Cage fanatic might recognize this as a reference to Cage's use of certain of Emerson's texts, disarticulated at the phonetic level to create nearly abstract vocalizations. But, upon reading *Modernist Montage*, we find that the Emersonianism vaunted by Sitney is rather its Protestant New England Transcendentalism, i.e., a celebration of the theological implications of "banal," quotidian reality. The radical montage component in modernism (hyperbolized in Cage's music) is overlooked in a skewed reading of certain "theological" implications and continuities with anterior traditions. One example of this problem among many concerns the complex relations between word and image, exemplified in Olson's alliterative consideration of the relations between *topos, typos* and *tropos*, i.e., the primacy of an amalgam of geography, mythology and poetry in the creative act. Given Sitney's theological and metaphysical bent, it is not surprising that this triumvirate should be used as a support for a poetics of coherence, meaning and belief. Yet this is precisely where we find a serious limitation in his delineation of modernism: what is excluded from its purview discloses a reductionism that goes far beyond

the demands of his theological metaphor. For to extend the etymological reference of *tropos* beyond Sitney's characterization of Olson's use of the term (all the while maintaining the theological metaphor, if need be) we might note that the term *tropos* also signifies the most complex structure of the Gregorian chant. In the last occurrence of the *Alleluia* in the Mass, the final syllable of the word may be set to an extended melisma, tantamount to a melodic line in itself: the *tropos*. This musical denotation of the word expresses precisely what is missing from Sitney's work: a consideration of *musication*, of the sonorous, sensual level existing beneath the signification of words, of one among the many realms of poetic nonsense. Modernism abounds in the presentation of pure sound in art: Italian and Russian Futurist poetry, Dada performance, Surrealist dreamworks, Schwitters' *Ursonata*, Artaud's glossolalia, Queneau and *Ou.Li.Po*, Dubuffet's literary works, *Ecrits Bruts*, etc. (Even the *tropos* of the Catholic Mass itself is reworked by the contemporary French composer Maurice Ohana, informed by a modernist sensibility, in his *Messe.)* Adorno's claim in *Minima Moralia* that, "music rescues name as pure sound—but at the cost of severing it from things," is apposite here. For reading Sitney, one would hardly suspect that modernism brought with it a crisis of representation and referentiality. His book suffers from its extreme literacy, i.e., from its concerted attempt to stress the literary origins of the works in question, at the expense of the non- and even anti-literary aspects of certain works. All told, the title of the book is an ironic misnomer: the essence of this text consists of an analysis of "the obscurity of vision in cinema and literature," while a systematic consideration of "modernist montage" is eschewed. Such a task could not succeed without a parallel study of music and the plastic arts. This lack is emblematic: as visibility is withheld at the core of modernist vision, so too are the limits of montage withheld from Sitney's analysis. In a book that is brilliant and erudite in its particular analyses, its archaeological successes pale somewhat in the light of its theoretical and historical omissions.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

String Light, C. D. Wright's sixth book of poetry, establishes her as one of the strongest poets of her generation. Wright's poems burn with stringy and resilient intensity. Having outgrown the elemental, gorgeous mourning in *Translations of the Gospels Back into Tongues*, Wright now locates the visionary solidly within the domestic. Her poems' narrative situations never call attention to their strangeness; Wright's everyday, however, is not the generic everyday of much American poetry, and she embodies the miraculous in speech acts that are both straightforward and unusual: naming herself ("I am the goat. Caroline by name. Nee 6 January. Domesticated / since the sixth century before Jesus"); commemorating a lake in the Ozarks ("Maybe you have to be from there to hear it sing: / Give me your water weeds, your nipples, / your shoehorn and four year letter jacket, / the molded leftovers from the singed pot."); anatomizing herself ("Inside of me / there is a period of mud. / Flies and midges come with the mud / followed by a time of intense sun"); narrating a relationship ("We'll hear them order / charcoal and beer, watching the fan work the smoke. / They could even take a room, and submit / unto the soaked bedding with one hundred strokes of night. / Here where imperfection gives way to perfection"). These speech acts set C. D. Wright apart from many of her contemporaries—she understands how such tasks nourish poems and delight readers; her writing embodies these speech acts with her own powerful lyricism.

Wright's tone is astringent—but when you make lyricism yourself instead of buying it at the store you aren't embarrassed, so you don't need to "undermine" lyricism. Her poems are thought and felt through fully, made actual in a construct of words; they embody voice in language, and write voice itself with verve and tenacity. We all know that voice is a trope but in Wright's poems the reader's willingness to hear oral presence is delighted again and again ("we coasted through the carwash—Little Floyd was / ready to throw a rod—he didn't ask if we scored the / homegrown"; "Since 1971 or before, I have hunted a bench / where I could eat my pimento cheese in peace. / If this were Tennessee and across that river Arkansas, / I'd meet you in West Memphis tonight. We could / have a big time"). Voice in writing makes a worldview palpable, so the world takes on a character. Wright has a great gift for humor that actually conveys value: she can represent children with wicked pleasure ("Naked in a splash of sun, he pees into a paper plate the guest / set down in the grass as she reached for potato chips"), dismiss the second rate ("Bourbon not fit to put on a sore"), and get the reader where the reader needs to go ("Why I come here: need for a bottom; something to refer to; / where all things visible and invisible commence to swarm.").

—JOSEPH LEASE

***Like They Are Now:* Electronic Artwork Texts, Queen St., Auckland, New Zealand, Nov.–Dec., 1991.**

36 nationwide writers and artists were invited to contribute to this exhibition of slogans, aphorisms, *koan,* witticisms, puns (etc., etc.) displayed on two electronic signboards above Queen St., Auckland's main downtown thoroughfare. On the night of the exhibition (Nov. 26th), an audience consisting principally of contributors, their friends and relatives, gathered on a corner opposite the Bank of New Zealand's board, waiting for the first message to unreel.

> "THERE IS NOTHING OUTSIDE OF THE TEXT" (1)
> WAGE WAR ON TOTALITY. . . (2)

The BNZ signboard displayed 70-odd texts in approximately 30 minutes, repeating a bracket of five "pages" (or individual frames of text) before shifting to the next group. Further up the street, "The Corner" sign flashed as many texts in approximately 10 minutes then ran back through the entire ensemble five more times. What Jenny Holzer can in retrospect call an "electronic-sign romance" (*Art in America,* Dec. 1986) was now being launched in Auckland. For while the first night was something of a trial run for the sake of participants, the messages began in earnest on the 27th. Interspersed among the yuletide advertisements, they would last until the New Year, engendering a "slight disjunction" (John Barnett) in pedestrian routines if not "violent displacement," a term associated with Holzer's work.

Curators Lesley Kaiser and John Barnett named their exhibition after Eisenhower's egregious brain-teaser, "Things are more like they are now than they ever were before." The paradox was one of at least a dozen quotations (from St. Teresa to Derrida), which contributed further voices to this electronic anthology. But good anthologies depend on some shrewd and perspicacious editing. Read the signs:

> INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS / DOUBLE THE
> POPULATION (3)
> BRAIN DAMAGE EPIDEMIC (4)
> WHAT IS IT IF IT ISN'T ART? (5)
> SPACE JUNK (6)

If so many texts seemed to respond directly/indirectly to the previous author's message, we had Kaiser and Barnett to thank for these corusca-

tions. The curators reshuffled the submitted drafts so that a number of matched pairs could take light from their mutual reflections, or generate an entirely new message from their mutual contact. One sign in particular seemed to state the obvious effect:

WORDS ARE BREEDING UP HERE LIKE WILD / FIRE FIRE FIRE (7)

Though sourced in an exhibition catalogue later distributed to the participants (and to any interested bystanders on the night of the 26th), the texts, quotes included, remained anonymous on the signboards. Anonymity, of course, helps to camouflage messages which alternate with the usual exhortations to buy, thereby enhancing the element of surprise. But there is also a sense in which an exhibition composed of anonymous contributions from 36 different people ultimately creates its own collective nucleus of thought in relation to which the author is merely a humble servant. This can be appreciated as a more radical move on the part of the curators than flashing a *koan* at unsuspecting Christmas shoppers, for such a collective statement taking precedence over the undisguised or identifiable voice is seldom associated with the function of art here in New Zealand, whereas surprise (or a chuckle) very often is.

Politically speaking, the thrust of this exhibition is an attempt to upstage, however briefly, the power invested in our Auckland galleries and syndicated critics—the hegemony that authorizes what it has already assimilated while obstructing or invalidating what it has already marginalized. For Kaiser and Barnett, there is no reason why art should always be the object viewed and absorbed into the system via polite conversation and the ritual libations of a medium white. It might, for instance, be "a little light reading" for as wide an audience as possible. Kaiser and Barnett have now begun to use "public, fast, and free" as their slogan, "FAST ART" as their motto, but the essence of their message (actually two of their most cunningly crafted texts) flashed almost dead centre on both parts of the exhibition: ART NO OBJECT. . .IS IT NECESSARY TO DRAW THE LINE?

. . . .

From "The Corner" signboard:

THEM DAUPHINS BESERK ABOUT US (8)
SYNCED CRISS MASS CROSSINGS (9)
WHY LIVE IF YOU CAN BE BURIED FOR 10 DOLLARS? (10)
THE ARTIST HAS TO LIVE LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE (11)
YES YOU ARE (12)
SKIN REMINDS ME OF THE STATE I'M IN (13)
WILL IT HURT? (14)

WASHBASIN (15)
NO IDEAS ALLOWED IN THIS SPACE (16)
ARE YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO BE? (17)
BE WHAT I WANT YOU TO BE! (18)

From the BNZ signboard:

. . .SOCIETY IS INFECTED BY THE MONO MANIA OF ACCOUNTING (19)
DO YOU MAKE A KILLING OR JUST A LIVING? (20)
MENSTRUATION IS MAINSTREAM (21)
A GOOD MANY THINGS GO AROUND IN THE DARK BESIDES SANTA CLAUS (22)
THERE ARE POSITIVE PEOPLE ABOUT BUT THEY AREN'T THE SAME AS US (23)
STRETCH YR DICTION / RENT A FICTION (24)
THE NEXT SENTENCE IS TRUE / THE LAST ONE WAS FALSE (25)
MAKE YOURSELF HONEY & THE FLIES WILL EAT YOU (26)
ADVERTEYES (27)
EMPTINESS (28)
THE DEEPEST LAUGHTER IS BEYOND A JOKE (29)
DETUMESCENCE OF IVORY TOYS (30)

Sources

(1) Derrida, from Rachel Kelly & Stephen Zepke; (2–3) Kelly & Zepke; (4) newspaper headline, from Kaiser & Barnett; (5) Claudia Bell; (6) Michele Leggott; (7) Constructor/list production; (8) Michele Leggott; (9) Wystan Curnow; (10) Freud, from Michael Harlow; (11) Billy Apple & Wystan Curnow; (12) Alan Brunton; (13) Susan Allpress; (14) Sue McKenzie; (15–16) Martin Poppelwell; (17–18) Monique Jansen; (19) Simone Weil, from Sally Rodwell; (20) Daniel Malone; (21) Tanya Meek; (22) attributed to Herbert Hoover, from Michael Harlow; (23) Clifford Owler, from Michele Leggott; (24) Kai Jensen; (25) James Littlewood; (26) Lynda Earle; (27) Susan Allpress; (28) Kaiser & Barnett; (29) Ted Jenner; (30) Tony Green.

—TED JENNER, AUCKLAND

Christopher Dewdney, *Concordat Proviso Ascendant* (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: *The Figures*, 1991)

A Natural History of Southwestern Ontario has provided Christopher Dewdney with the topic for a three-volume poem, the last book of which appears under the title of *Concordat Proviso Ascendant.* The entirety provides the occasion for an intelligently retentive mind to create a poetics of knowledge. Although it might not seem so, this is praise in itself, for most poets who attempt such a thing arrive only at a poetics of information.

Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night (1978) and *The Cenozoic Asylum* (1982) antecede the current work. At Dewdney's disposal is sufficient mental precision to ruminate with, into, through, and against incommensurate strata of knowledge:

> THIS IS OF TWO WORLDS—the one diurnal men know and
> that other world where lunar mottled eels stir like
> dreams in shallow water. Allowing both these mecha-
> nisms to continue operating, we slowly remove and replace
> their parts with corresponding and interlocking nothings.

In this passage from *Spring Trances*, two kinds of knowing—consciousness and braininess—make equal claim on attention; their unrelated coexistence perpetually annealed in language creates the matter Dewdney causes to be poetry, in this book and thereafter.

Concordat is an encomium of a sort. At once a song of praise and an extended description of the female body as though it were natural history and of natural history as though it were the female body, this last part of Dewdney's work attempts an identification of figure and landscape immediately identifiable as conventional but without the stigma.

> There is the miracle of your collarbones, avian &
> delicate as your shoulders
> their sharp dominion.

Passing from this "Litany of Attributes," *Concordat* also moves from the present to past geologic time, and as it does so, the reality of nature becomes interdisciplinary.

> SHE IS BEYOND YOU NOW. Her piscine features
> embryonic and dissipated with wisdom.
> Her nakedness possessed each time a seething
> harlequin of erectile sequins.

Reading in New York this autumn, Dewdney reminded us of his interest in the physiological basis of consciousness (construed and skewed in his book *The Immaculate Perception*, 1986), and *Concordat* further substantiates his belief that in the poetry that inheres in empirical data eloquently expressed. To ensure this point, the first and third volumes open with brief narratives of actual eye-witness accounts of tornadoes, exceptional events that leave us stupefied. Here Dewdney presents us with exempla without the moral ending, or, if you like, modern exempla precisely because deprived of moral endings or transcendent truths.

But as his books reveal, even physiology or prehistory beget mystic, antediluvian coincidence. That is to say, like the poet and essayist Geoffrey O'Brien and like the conceptual artist Robert Smithson, both weaned on the hallucinogenic culture to which the 1960s gave rise, Dewdney is "high" on a certain cultural mix, the very syllabics of which, thrown together, create a bouillabaisse of subjectively construed empirical phenomena:

> SHE IS LIQUID DARKNESS occult with desire.
> An abandoned airplane hangar,
> scattered curls of corrugated steel littering
> the floor punctuate with sun discs.

Coming upon these lines as the poem unfolds raises the possibility that with mystical ambiance let through the back door, the realm of natural science has presupposed the human sciences all along, and that speculative rather than explanatory processes fuel the *carmina burana* from the start. Dewdney's stupendous talent is such that we are ravished by the linguistic phenomenology even where unpersuaded by the spiritualist aspects of expanded consciousness. Meanwhile, in his mania for expression, Dewdney proves that language, intrinsically interpretive, is poetic no matter what.

Forrest Gander, *Eggplants & Lotus Root* (Providence, Rhode Island: Burning Deck, 1991.)

The title belies the content of this chapbook's cerebral sensuality. No macrobiotic orientalism will be found in its pages, even though its tripartite prose poems receive such section titles as "Tea Scripture," "Moon in the Afternoon," and "A Macula of Light." What there is, however, is a radical modernity by which the female body, dismembered by the eye's intense gaze, brings somatic and anatomical detail into exquisite union with language.

The tradition is, then, one of early modern objectivism as poststructuralism might construe it. Olfactory as well as visual observation, working

overtime, govern the production of phrases that may have been directed by seeing something actual which now exist in virtual space. Opening each tripartite work with a piece of writing called "Geometric Losses," this virtual space presents itself:

> *or her hair.* Its rain. Her face juts out from. Winter of rooms electricity, her hair lifts. The rug coarse as hog stubble. Musk her hair. Held down by the neck. Or in. At once recognizable by intimate: near-burning smell. White mole to the right of her coccyx, those hairs. Inside of her ears is sweating. A sense of duration spilt across the pillow. Vague and specific like. An analogy, undislodgable. Pubic hair under tongue. *Words spoken into*

Cognitive processes, analogous to the body presented in the mind through discontinuous sensory input, are dis-splayed here, no less experientially for being linguistic. In "Geometric Losses," as in "Violence's Narrative Continued" and "Meditative," composing each prose-poem in this fine uncompromising book, no shred of pedagogy may be detected, no ideological preening leaves its trace.

John Taggart, *Loop* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon), 1991

The poetical correctness of the concrete poem that features materiality with utmost literalness is so often the source of its own doom: a poem respected yet never read. In the objectivist orientation of John Taggart, however, admirable self-regulating systems and songs are one and the same, the song enacting the desire of the system to know itself even as the system informs the desire to cause the song.

Literariness is plentiful in the recurrence of the plain speech by which Taggart disperses vowels and consonants:

> From across the sea from across the glass
> gathered brought together are gathered
> as in a mantle as bees in the crystal
> gathered brought together by the word
> from across the sea cross glass to die.

As with the entire poem and book, this stanza from the poem "Nativity," for instance, renders spatialization tacitly yet with sufficient arbitrariness to

count. Gertrude Stein in remembrance, or Stein a remembered by Wallace Stevens's looking-glass, is rendered present yet reconceived in Taggart's own concrete linguistic field. The open, because recombinatory, syntax allows for the word to exist thanks to dispersal; thanks to dispersal words propagate sense: the paradox of ancient fertility rite post-structurally disseminated is a constant thematic.

Perhaps the form expresses Taggart's quandary of whether his is a poetics of densities or of gaps. Several of his meditative notes, included in the book as George Oppen might, that is to say, giving commensurate status to the speculative process and the creative product the process becomes, occasionally raise this issue. While not strictly speaking a contradiction, the opposition between densities and gaps suggests a situation in which Taggart feels torn between different modes of actualization. To put it in the musical terms he does use at one point: if not Xenakis, then what of Reich?

Loop contains many masterly poems. This is not surprising, since the principle of repetition provides a mechanism of guaranteed proficiency. But mere proficiency is a predictable formalism that Taggart assiduously avoids, thanks, precisely, to his thoughtful pursuit of different modes of actualization. Temporal strategies as different—and as non-trivial—as those embodied in "Chain Letter," "Eight Headnotes," "The Rothko Chapel Poem" and "Lab Notes" truly renew our contemporary literature. *Loop* is a book of consequence.

—MARJORIE WELISH

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN'S VIET FLAKES (1965)

In December 1990 Carolee Schneemann showed her film *Viet Flakes* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. It is a modest film, rather short, originally shot using an old 8 mm camera, makeshift lens, pieces of glass, and news photos, under the most primitive circumstances. There was no budget, no special effects, no actors to pay, no film crew, no technical assistants other than a few friends. There was a sound track later provided

by the composer James Tenney. *Viet Flakes* is a film shot out of necessity. It is a film that is theatrical, even though all the actors are the subjects already taken in news media photographs. Schneemann made the film literally on her studio floor—working with scissors, lights and pieces of glass, the way an expressionist painting might have been made. Given the year 1965, *Viet Flakes* was made before the war in southeast Asia had become what we know today as "the Vietnam War." The effect of the United States military in this area of the world had not as yet achieved popular currency or understanding at home. The anti-war marches and frequent demonstrations, so often identified with this era, were just beginning to occur. The focus, at the time, was on Civil Rights. It was a moment in recent history when attention to domestic issues, such as Civil Rights, were absorbed into the international spotlight. Soon the escalation of the war in southeast Asia would become an issue of preeminent concern. *Viet Flakes* was a personal response to this shifting political sensibility, this move toward another aesthetic language, another form of speaking about issues of content through art.

The pop irony in the title *Viet Flakes* suggests an absurd relationship in the clash between American popular culture and the devastation and horrors being produced in the jungles of southeast Asia. In that the subject matter of her film is based entirely on the optical inspection and scanning of media photographs describing various wartime atrocities, one may find the absurd connotation of the film's title paradoxical. It is paradoxical, as is Rosenquist's *F-111*, in that one feels the symbolic impact of the news media in the United States as one might adapt to Corn Flakes for breakfast. It is like an ideograph made of two opposing elements, an oxymoron, in which Corn Flakes and Vietnam can be synthesized by the media as "Viet Flakes"—ready to eat, ready to absorb, but never to reflect upon the language of the media or to agree on the complexity of the situation in which war is being waged. *Viet Flakes* is an exegesis on wartime reportage and the desire to understand its fundamental cause and effect relationship. Schneemann was able to retrieve photographs from the *Liberation* News Service before they appeared in American newspapers and magazines.[1] The gruesome subject matter of these images which revealed scenes of torture, executions, and the contorted faces and bodies of the wartime dead, were at the time unknown to the American public. The *effects* of the war—the human toll—was unknown. only statistics and numbers were reported as fact. More often than not these statistics were either misleading or inaccurate. Schneemann felt that the Vietnam War was a clandestine war being fought without the full knowledge of the American people. The explication of these news photographs, placing them within an expressive, even dramatic context, was an essential point of the film. Once she had

gathered over sixty photographs together, Schneemann placed them in a triple arc in front of her on the floor which she could easily see with her Bolex to scan the images in various integral connections. She would use repetition, inversions, and permutations of the selected images in order to construct a dramatic event, almost as if she were directing characters on stage. The dramatic intensity of *Viet Flakes* is considerable. It is one of the most startling features of this 11 minute film. The entire sequence of effects, however, was done with the camera, moving in and out of the photographs, deliberately blurring them, not allowing the optical gaze of the viewer to fully capture their effect or their content.

Schneemann's collaboration with composer James Tenney was a necessary and significant part of *Viet Flakes* in that the soundtrack aided and abetted the visual effects. For the film, Tenney used 3 second intervals of spliced sound from sources ranging from Vietnamese religious chants to Popular songs, both in Vietnamese and American genres, even adding choral works by Bach. This bricolage of structural effects in sound gave an eerie atmosphere to the images that is difficult to articulate. The formal linkage between the soundtrack by Tenney and Schneemann's readymade photos places the viewer always on the verge of recognition. The fact that recognition of the image or the sound bite is never completely resolved, but instead dissolved, is a perennial condition of the film's experience. The entire filming occurred one December afternoon in Schneemann's loft, but the preparations occurred over the duration of a month getting everything that was necessary, putting it in place, rearranging the schemata of photographs, rehearsing the movements of the pans, trying Various lens, magnifying glasses from dime stores along with found pieces of glass.

It was not until February 1966, during the Angry Arts Week, that *Viet Flakes* was shown at the Martinique Theatre in New York along with two other films that Schneemann had made under the general title of *Snows*. For this multi-media event, Tenney and Schneemann worked out a method for involving the audience by placing an electronic switching system under the seats of the viewers. By doing so, the viewers' movements would determine the quality and texture of the sound as it fed into the audio-system that accompanied the various films. It was a completely interactive film event with feedback based on the intensity of body movements that followed the viewers' perceptions.

What is impressive, however, is how well *Viet Flakes* holds up today as an independent film, a deconstruction, in fact, of the news media, especially of wartime reportage. One reason for this staying power, other than the topical relationship the film has to the recent situation in the Persian Gulf,

is its dramaturgical component. *Viet Flakes* is not merely a documentary based on a series of documentary fragments (Are not documents always fragmentary to such a context?) , but the manner in which Schneemann constructs a sense of the tragic dimensions of the war at a time when the true impact of the Vietnam War was scarcely understood. In her own way, using the medium of film as a plastic medium to make a meta-document of the war, Schneemann manages to give the viewer a sense of the dimension of these atrocities, to put the war in a human perspective, to go directly to the source of the tragedy in the way that the great Greek dramatists did. Schneeman's irony, mixed with tragedy, offers a vision of the absurd; hence, "Viet Flakes"— the synthesis of American pop and Southeast Asia.

January 22, 1991. The war in the Persian Gulf started a week ago. The primary tactic thus far has been "surgical bombing"—the exact placement of a missile, one that is capable of descending into an air shaft to do its damage. This would be in contrast to "saturation bombing" which is what the American forces used in Vietnam and Cambodia. In the earlier war, the bombs were not so precise. This war was more high tech, more accurate, more electronic. Remote control. The causes are studied and rehearsed but the effects are uncertain; that is, the real effects, the effects that wear a human face, the effects contained with human minds and bodies, the interactive effects, the global effects. No effects are certain. The tragedy is yet to unfold. Seeing *Viet Flakes* again today is a bold reminder that for every action there is a reaction. Schneemann seems to suggest that this is not only a physical law but a meta-physical concern as well. In wartime, the spirit suffers through neglect and denial. Wholeness is sacrificed for fragmentation, more documents, more pans and repetitions of another tragedy, the same tragedy, where only the resistance of the eye can secure itself for bodily action and response.

1 All facts about the making of the film were obtained from Xeroxed statements given to me by the artist or in various conversations since my initial viewing of the film in April 1989 at the Anthology Film Archives.

—ROBERT C. MORGAN

from *Viet Flakes;* photographer unknown

A winning, poignant book is *Sappho's Lyre: Archaic Lyric and Women Poets of Ancient Greece*, translated by Diane Raynor, with a foreword by W. R. Johnson (University of California Press, 1991). One is no longer condemned to the Loeb edition to try to eke out an understanding of the more sparse female lyricists (Praxilla, Corinna, Erinna). These translations are so good, and so beautifully arranged that one is almost satisfied even with the tragedy of the remains. (Let no one say grammarians and pedants don't have their purposes, though the elegant scholarly allegory of Johnson's introduction makes ringingly clear the ways in which lyric ideology as well as grim accidents prevented the entry into the canon of these poems, and thus eroded the possibility of their survival.) Raynor is a gifted translator; I read her Nossis and her Sappho with a particular pleasure. Raynor has gone to some kind of singing school—otherwise she would not have been able to produce the precision and melody of many of her poetic choices. For example, the instruction "And knowing my name is Nossis, go on!" or the arrangement of the Sappho fragments

> Come, divine lyre, speak to me,
> take voice!
> . . .
> . . .
> I say someone in another time will remember us.

The only possible rival for the translations of Archilochos are the renditions of Davenport. But he sometimes reaches hard and reconstructs some of the drama; Raynor lets the drama come quietly. For purity of line, elegance of word choice, and a fresh pleasure, Raynor's translations are strongly recommended.

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Harpsichord & Salt Fish, Lorine Niedecker's final book (completed barely half a year before her death) is in print now (Pig Press, 1991) in accurate and well-annotated form, thanks to the care and commitment of Jenny Penberthy, one of the deans of Niedecker scholarship. The book begins with "Thomas Jefferson" and ends with "Darwin" (I think the two figures taken together give rise to the title). These poems place Niedecker among admirers of rationalists, meliorists, and those whose investigatory proposals (political or scientific) are world-ranging in scope, though concerned initially with the elaboration of detail. Darwin's "conclusions" become, perforce, Niedecker's final words in poetry:

the universe
not built by brute force
but designed by laws
The details left

to the working of chance
'Let each man hope
and believe
what he can' (p. 46)

where the line break between "hope" and "and believe" bespeaks the extraordinary poise of benign implacability that Niedecker maintained. My favorites among these are the more personal considerations of her sources, her craft, her dreams. The poem "LZ" should be the subject of much meditation, as a recovery, for and about Zukofsky, of Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for death. . . ." The major "Subliminal" offers a dream view of her mother "tall, tormented/dark infested," and this view of herself, schooled by and in a vast universe:

Waded, watched, warbled
learned to write on slate
with chalk from an ancient sea. . . . (p. 31)

And about to disappear into it. For this poem also has a section in which Niedecker imagines her human smallness in conjunction with the vastness but also personableness of the universe and time. Given these themes and depths, it is a little triste that Pig Press's presentation is illustrated and wrapped/covered with artsy efforts that are not attuned to the contents (with the possible exception of one pen & ink fish), and moreover that the book sports unsubtle bright blue end papers. But altogether this is, thankfully, one more precious arrow shot towards the target of a newly edited Niedecker.

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Diane Glancy, *Lone Dog's Winter Count* (West End Press, 1991) is mixed for me with the solemnities of the "prize-winning" (though both publisher and poet know I begrudge no prizes to anyone; it's just what they symbolize and control). And mixed also because of Glancy's tendency to framing and depicting: "I'm trying to find the words."

Just look at the family album. My white mother
her sisters their husbands our cousins. Then my
father my brother & I the stuffed skin of sparrow

hawks on our heads the *g'ig'ig'ig'ig'i* in our
throats. (p. 2)

But what has moved me from the start with Glancy is not what she's trying to find the words *for* (already existing pictures), but what she's trying to find the words OF. Glancy's principled desire to recombine words from Native American languages, with English, and slightly deformed versions of English (in spelling and visual text) creates intense linguistic struggles on the page and elaborates a rich polyvocality that is socially meaningful.

The gauze of wurdzah spins
huza huza
He conjugates our trail
The rags of his voice
a night lifted with a clunk. (p. 31)

That the Native American languages still exist, come forth, bubble up is made extremely precious, because extremely precarious, especially given the fact of repression via the cultural attack of schooling: see the poems "The First Reader Santee Training School, 1873" and the inventive dramas of the dialogue/serial poem "Death Cry for the Language." The main task of the book is angry elegy; another central poem is "Trying to Crow."

The QuiVerEE. ZEET! ZEET! The little clawed feet
of the turkeys DANZE. I MoUrn for Co-To-Te. The
warriors we lost. The land that sank with tHEM. (p. 51)

•

The poems and works in David Antin's *Selected Poems: 1963-1973* (Sun & Moon Press, 1991) are announced as precursors of his performance pieces and talk poems, as if the project of appreciation were already archival. One might as well consider the task as understanding what happens when a person, using the Zukofskyian goad of "thinking with the things as they exist," begins seriously to meditate: *things, thinking, exist*, not to speak of *with* and *the* and *as* and *they/them*. ("Meditation" is the most used title here, for individual poems, ranged in a series, and for one of the books collected.) Genres entertained: aphorism, pensée, syllogism, catechism, epistle, allegory, parody, fable, decoupage of often factual materials, dialogue spiritual or philosophic in design. ("don't you think it was the right place to begin? //well what would have been a better time?" p. 143). In short, a non-romantic imagination ("18th century" as postmodern?), yet one inflected with every psychological self-scrutiny and self-consciousness it is possible coolly to elaborate.

Antin here depends on an enormous mapping, Whitmanic but bleached (as if run through some kind of Shaker, "objectivist" or European plainness): catalogues, lists (28 kinds of black), insistent anaphora. But this is done paradoxically not to accumulate, but to dislodge and identify ("there is a piece of bread between us/ if we could only see it"), to separate and analyze "[bread] is a body/ containing light"); to set simple things in multiple relationships:

> bread is a body
> water is a body
> the earth is a body
> the sun is a body . . . . (p. 64)

The later poems are rare documents of self-conscious examination inside of thought, probing processes, means, tools, gestures of elaboration and denial ("so i had a feeling tonight that nothing i meant to say was over yet/ /that it was also too late to start//which led me to think i would start later . . . ." p. 144). The works in meditation are almost alarming as records or "scenarios" for what happens when one sits still, and watches void with one eye, language with the other, and the body with history.

Antin also produces a peculiarly mordant and restrained irony as in the poem out of the historical crises of the 1960s—"a list of the delusions of the insane what they are afraid of," which turns out to be no more and no less than many things that have happened: "that evil chemicals have been placed in the earth/. . ./that they hear people screaming/that they smell burnt flesh. . . ." (p. 39) The twentieth-century history of Europe comes up for scrutiny numerous times. As, from the brilliant, playful "stanzas,"

> All Germans are white men
> all civilized men are white
> all Germans are civilized (p. 192)

Antin gets a great range of emotional effects from his simplicity of means—cumulative effects, control of the pace of disclosure, white space and stanza shapes, a guerilla-like removal of the self from the place of identity and insistence. It is this control of sculptural shape, emotional pace, and continuance that probably offered much to his "talk pieces." But precursor or not, this book is still news on its own terms; it is absolutely worth consideration.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Marjorie Welish, *And the Windows Flew Open* (Providence: Burning Deck, 1991)

Marjorie Welish's *And the Windows Flew Open* resonates in a world of lyricism. It is work that explores the stylized, the ambiguous ways of language and the disruptions that accompany such a practice. Words mean, but one is never sure exactly what they mean, and if what they mean is intentional. Within the book a woman who might find her husband boring moves through an "advocacy of lyrical excess" (15), there is talk of "full scale illusionist realism" (22), and "what comes back from the printers is too flimsy/for mailing—a sunset—and we have to redo the announcements./Or perhaps he thought I meant "postcard-*like*" (59).

It is in this world that Welish presents a poetry that breaks away. The book begins with an urge to locate oneself geographically (poetically): "in the long run we must fix our compass,/and implore our compass" (13). And Welish negotiates this concern throughout the poem. Henry James, for example, is one obvious geographic point of reference in the book. There is a "carpet within the figure." Posturing, waiting, the female self in rooms filled only with doors and windows—these are the concerns of both James and Welish. As in James's novels, words in Welish's poems tend to "hang-fire," waiting the pause before the gun goes off. For what is important to both these writers about language are the layers of meaning that resonate beneath the unsaid, the ambiguity that accompanies specificity. In a world of language where "fashion dictates the idiom solicitous of us line by line/ while remaining unconvincing in each phase" (20) Welish instructs, she opens the door to language and the windows fly open:

> And on the fortieth day
> after I wrote the poem you call derivative
> is original if late, I opened the door
> and the windows flew open
> in a revolutionary manner, bare-breasted
> and I saw myself
> stepping onto a movie set of rain imitating rain,
> a central fiction. (71)

—JULIANA SPAHR

Translating

I've said it before: Poetry is that which is worth translating. The poem dies when it has no place to go.

The object of a translation into English is not a poem in English.

A translation creates a specific kind of distance ("willing suspension"): the reader never forgets that what is being read is a translation.

A translation that sounds like a poem in English is usually a bad translation.

A translation that strives for the accuracy of a bilingual dictionary is always a bad translation.

A translation must sound like a translation written in living English—and more, an English that takes advantage of certain possibilities that are not normally available to poems written in English.

The success of a translation is nearly always dependent on the smallest words: prepositions, articles. Anyone can translate nouns.

A foreign word with multiple meanings can—though few do it—be translated into several English words. One word can lead to a few, just as a few words can lead to one.

Effects that cannot be reproduced in the corresponding line can usually be picked up elsewhere, and should be. Which is why it is more difficult to translate a single poem than a book of poems by a single author. Which is why a translation shouldn't be, though it always is, judged on a line-by-line basis.

Few translators hear what they've written.

Pound intuitively corrected mistakes in the Fenollosa manuscript. For the rest of us, it is impossible to translate from a language one doesn't know. To translate through an "informant" is to paint by numbers: it's their design, you merely add some color.

Everything can be translated. That which is "untranslatable" hasn't yet found its translator.

The original is never better than the translation. The translation is worse than another translation, written or not yet written, of the same original.

Translation is not duplication. Every reading is a new reading: why should we expect a translation to be identical?

Metaphor: from the familiar to the strange. Translation: from the strange to the familiar. The failed metaphor is too strange; the failed translation too familiar.

Many of the best translators know the original language imperfectly. All of the worst translators are native speakers of it.

Translations are normally reviewed by members of the Department of the original's Language. The are proprietary, and cannot help but find all translations from their language—except those done by certain colleagues—to be travesties.

Translation theory, however beautiful, is useless for translating. There are the laws of thermodynamics, and there is cooking.

Most translators are capable of translating only a few writers in their lifetimes. The rest is rote.

A translation is based on the dissolution of the self. A bad translation is the insistent voice of the translator.

To translate is to learn how poetry is written. Nothing else is so successful a teacher, for it carries no baggage of self-expression.

Any poem should be translated as many times as possible, even by the same translator over the years. Only fundamentalists believe in a "definitive" translation.

A translation of classical Greek from 1900, say, is "dated" in a way that an English poem from 1900 is not, for we expect a translation to be written in a version of current speech, and refuse to make the mental readjustments as we would for a contemporaneous poem. With greater time, however—say, an Elizabethan translation from the classical Greek—such recalibration becomes inescapable: the translation, in our reading, becomes part of the age in which it was written.

Nearly everywhere, the great ages of poetry have been, not coincidentally, periods of intense translation. With no news from abroad, a culture ends up repeating the same things to itself. It needs the foreign not to imitate, but to transform

An anonymous occupation, yet people have died for it.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER [1988]

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

AMIRI BARAKA'S *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* is reviewed in this issue. WILL ALEXANDER is currently working on a trilogy of novels, of which the second is completed and entitled "Isolation, Neutrality, and Limbo." The trilogy is entitled "Sunrise in Armageddon." ARMAND SCHWERNER is completing Tablet XXVIII. MARJORIE WELISH'S *The Windows Flew Open* is reviewed in this issue. PAMELA WYE is an artist living in NYC. PIERRE JORIS has recently published *Turbulence* (St. Lazaire Press, Rhinebeck) and *The Irritation Ditch* (Parenthesis Writing Series, La Jolla). GUSTAF SOBIN'S first novel, *Venus Blue*, has just been published by Little, Brown; a second, *Dark Mirrors* (A Novel of Provence) will appear in July, published by Bloomsbury, London. DAVID HINTON'S *Selected Poems of Tu Fu* was recently published by New Directions. His *Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* is forthcoming from Copper Canyon. CLAUDIA KEELAN has new work forthcoming in *Agni, River Styx, Volt*, and *Pequod*. R.D.SHIPP has published poetry in *Ploughshares, New York Quarterly, Northwest Review*, and *Mudfish*. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN'S translation of César Vallejo's *Trilce* will be published by Marsilio (NYC) fall, 1992. STAN FRIEDMAN has recently completed his first book, "Shooters & Cat's Eyes." His criticism has appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*. A selection of GERRIT LANSING'S poetry and prose appeared in *Notus* #9. PETER ANASTAS is the author of *Glooskap's Children: Encounters with the Penobscot Indians of Maine*. ELIOT WEINBERGER has four books coming out this year: *Outside Stories*, essays, from New Directions; a bilingual anthology of American poetry since 1950 from Ediciones del Equilibrista, Mexico City; and translations of Xavier Villarrutia's *Nostalgia for Death* (Copper Canyon) and Cecilia Vicuña's *Unraveling Words & The Weaving of Water* (Greywolf). NATHANIEL TARN'S *Seeing America First* was published by Coffee House Press, 1989. CHARLES BERNSTEIN'S newest book is *A Poetics* (Harvard University Press). MILTON KESSLER is completing a film, with his daughter, Paula Kessler, on Whitman's last Camden years. ALLEN S WEISS'S *Miroirs de l'infini: Le jardin à la franciase et la métaphysique* has just been published by Les Editions du Seuil, Paris. TED JENNER has recently published *Dedications*, poems and translations/imitations from Greek lyric fragments, and contributed to *Word for Word* and *Like They Are Now*, artwork/text exhibitions, Auckland, 1991. ROBERT C. MORGAN is a Contributing Editor to *Arts Magazine* and currently a Visiting Professor of Art History at Barnard College, Columbia University. RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS recently published *Drafts 3-14* with Potes & Poets Press.

PLEASE NOTE: *Sulfur* #31 (October, 1992) will be a regular issue. #32 and 33 will be special issues (whose contents will be announced in #31). ***From July 1992 to July 1993 no unsolicited manuscripts will be read.***

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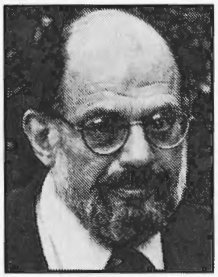

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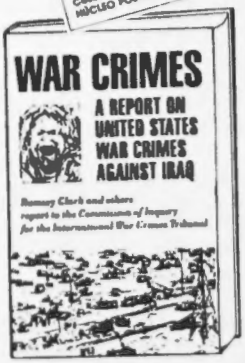

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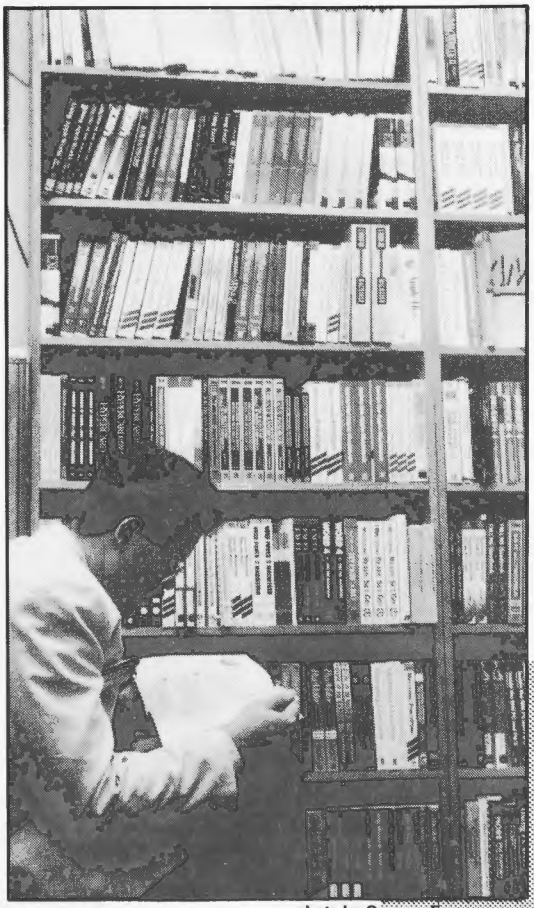

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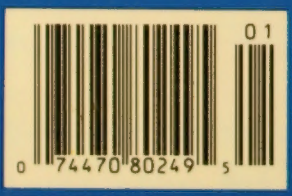
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